

HONG KONG ARTISTS

/
20 PORTRAITS



Cordelia and Christoph Noe

LAM TUNG-PANG

MAKING SENSE
OF THE MOMENT



NAME

Lam Tung-pang

BORN IN

1978, Hong Kong

LIVES IN

Hong Kong

STUDIED AT

Central Saint Martins College
of Art and Design

The Chinese University
of Hong Kong



Shirt / 2006 / charcoal, acrylics on wood /
51 x 56 cm

Born in 1978 and raised in Hong Kong, Lam Tung-pang has achieved critical acclaim for his unconventional, deeply personal work that intertwines a refreshing aesthetic with contemplations on the environment, selfhood, material and time.

Lam's early works *Fotan* (2003), *I See You* (2003) and *Shirt* (2006) are just a few examples that offer observations on his familiar surroundings. The abstract, often minimal approach and the use of everyday materials such as nails and sand, coupled with charcoal sketches, depict a mood resulting in a visual experience translated into a melancholic gloom. Drawing upon memory and imagination, it was also around

the same time that Lam produced a number of pieces that negotiate the relationship between image, object and space. By taking the form of three-dimensional installations, his *Shake* (2005), *In the Memory of Rainbows* (2005) and *Folding* (2006) exemplify the versatility and originality of Lam's artistry that continue to form the heart of his oeuvre.

As someone who grew up in the 1990s, it is important for me to note that there is a common albeit vague sense of anxiety and helplessness shared by the Hong Kong people when it comes to the dissolving of the colony. For many, such apprehension only takes shape over time with the unfolding change in politics

LAM
TUNG-PANG



Diorama series / 2010 / acrylics, charcoal, clay, plastic models and image transferred on plywood / dimensions variable

and culture. It is in this context—with the full complexity of the situation apparent—that I examine Lam’s work created after 2007, a decade after the 1997 handover. Beginning with *Selling My Soul* (2010)—a key installation and performance in his career—Lam began to channel more interest into exploring the notions of existence and disappearance, which correlate with his awareness of Hong Kong’s loss and isolation.

Invited to be part of the international group show “No Soul for Sale,” *Selling My Soul* took its place at Tate Modern in London. As part of the installation, Lam used a rubber eraser to erase his charcoal drawings, leaving a residue of crumbs on the floor. Warren Leung Chi Wo, another exhibiting artist, helped Lam to document the working process. From a series of photographs, one can see that Lam stood and moved on a platform raised above the floor. Four sheets of paper, each measuring 1 by 2.4 metres and filled with charcoal line drawings, were hung on ninety degree intersecting walls. On the platform were fifty matchbox-sized erasers, each stamped with a custom-made drawing of Lam standing and erasing. Accord-

ing to Lam, his initial plan was to erase the charcoal over the course of three days; however he received a sudden instruction from the Tate to finish within just a few hours of the opening. The speed of his movement, as a result of the tension created by haste, further intensified the urge of his erasing and the overall sense that the impending future lay in the very moment of the disappearing present.

Whilst Lam rushed to finish, a multitude of his own actions occurred simultaneously, with dual implications of referencing: as the eraser wiped out the charcoal sketches, it also effaced the self—the self-depicting gesture of erasing is imprinted on the eraser, which is as much an object as a character that complicates the relationship between action and material over the course of time. The performative process of Lam’s attempt to obliterate the dark charcoal vividly portrayed the interchangeability of the threshold between materiality and immateriality. At the end, the paper’s resemblance to white noise, the crumbs strewn on the floor and the fragments of remaining eraser were left to elicit the temporal and instantaneous presence. The separation of the physical substance from its



Folding / 2006 / charcoal, acrylics on plywood / 210 × 150 cm



Centuries of Hong Kong / 2011 / acrylics, charcoal and pencil on plywood / 425×717×5cm

body in the drawing was equally embedded in the self-consumed action of the eraser. What one considers to be permanent was replaced by the realization of something in between: the removal is the creation of a new layer of void and absence, at the expense of both the original medium and the new tools sharing a synchronized evanescence.

If Lam's earlier work was more about a young mind observing and interpreting as a form of reaction to the outside world, by the post-handover stage he had gained a greater self-awareness of his environment. *Selling My Soul* represents a paradigmatic shift in Lam's vision and practice. Lam was able to take a metaphysical perspective on society; by developing his own philosophy he gained a level of confidence, as well as freedom, to pick and choose between thought methodologies and artistic approaches. *Selling My Soul* could therefore be seen as a milestone that signals the more open and possibly even more critical examination of the artist's relationship with his surroundings that was to develop in later works.

As conceptual as Lam's work might appear, one might be surprised to hear how personable he is and how candidly he speaks about his creative process, and specifically of being an artist in Hong Kong. His work barely contained any visible trace of this locality until a solo project in London in 2008 called "CITIES project: Where is My Mum?" which questioned how the identity of a city can have an impact on the individual. This exhibition, presented in the format of a question, has since been transformed into a panorama of duality and contradiction, as demonstrated in Lam's subsequent *Diorama*

series (2010) and *Long View Under Scrutiny* series (2011), and more recently in the epic painting *Centuries of Hong Kong* (2011). Within these new developments, Lam is experimenting with a means of fragmentation, which is also an indication of his present milieu. His ability to suture and appropriate fragments of old images with scenes from today expresses a sense of curiosity, an inquisition of mood, in an era where change is so swift and imbalanced that the contrast between past and present becomes part of the landscape.

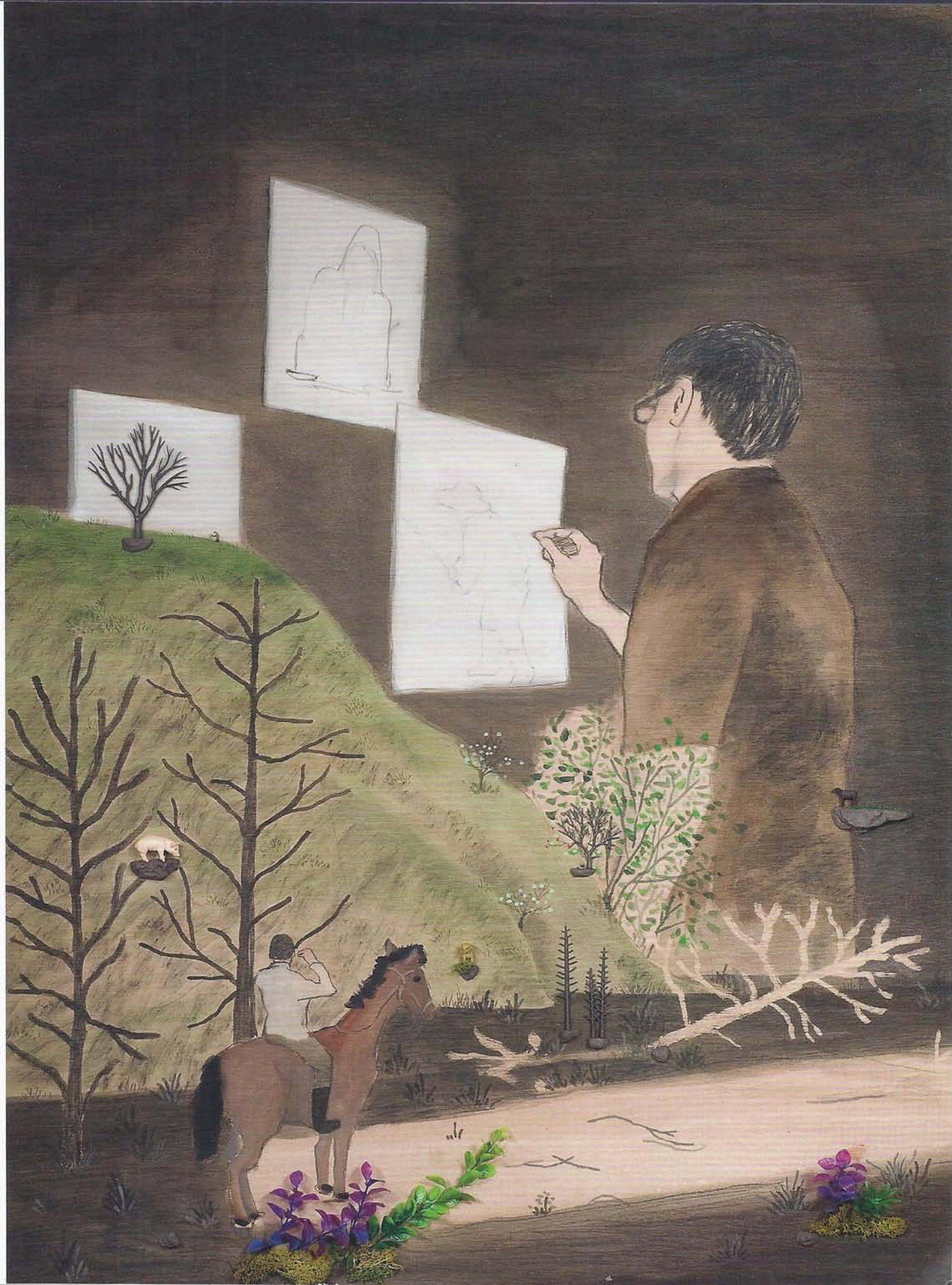
I have written at length about *The Youngest and Oldest* (2011), a significant mixed-media piece from his recent *Long View Under Scrutiny* series.⁰¹ For me, this work visualizes the internalization of Hong Kong after its handover. By reintroducing fragments of the past and then by a process of constructing, his work provides a means of experiencing how the references of age and place lose, and maybe even re-establish, their relevancy. The intangible experience of displacement and uncertainty is translated in the vast expanse of scenery that Lam places in front of the viewer, from whom he looks for the similar desire to feel both a sense of belonging and of resistance to containment. Such a paradoxical state of being speaks to the fragility and tenuousness of life itself, magnified by the limited time existing therein in the slice of breathing space—free from the just-ended, colonial yoke and the forthcoming unification.

When Lam Tung-pang was asked about his recent fascination with ancient imagery he responded with: "My fondness with the past is grounded in my understanding of the present." Indeed, standing on the centre flux of the epoch, there is probably not much difference between looking forward and recalling the past. From his early work reflecting the life of the everyday, to the performance-based installations in which a specific experience of time played a vital role, and further to the recent re-constructing of cross intervention connecting old and new, Lam's approach is determined by his imagining of a non-linear environment—by placing his art precisely on the brink. For Lam, this is his engagement with reality: to create the possibility of experiencing time in all processes of perception, action and cognition, and therein capturing the transient, ephemeral human visage that bears witness to a delicate and perplexing historical moment.

by Abby Chen

right page: *Diorama series* / 2009 / acrylics, charcoal and plastic models on plywood / 122×91.5cm

⁰¹ A Chen, "The Best of Times: Lam Tung-pang's *Long View Under Scrutiny*" in *Yishu*, Volume 11, Number 1, Jan–Feb 2012.



**SELECTED
SOLO
EXHIBITIONS**

110
/
111

2011

Lam Tung-pang: Long View Under
Scrutiny / Hanart T Z Gallery /
Hong Kong

2010

Diorama /
Hanart T Z Gallery / Hong Kong

2008

CITIES project: Where is My Mum? /
EXHIBIT, CHINA NOW / London

**SELECTED
GROUP
EXHIBITIONS**

2011

Vision of Nature: /
Hong Kong Arts Centre /
Hong Kong

2010

No Soul for Sale /
Tate Modern / London

Hong Kong Contemporary Art
Biennial Awards 2009 /
Hong Kong Museum of Art /
Hong Kong

Legacy and Creations—Art vs Art /
Museum of Contemporary Art
Shanghai / Shanghai

2008

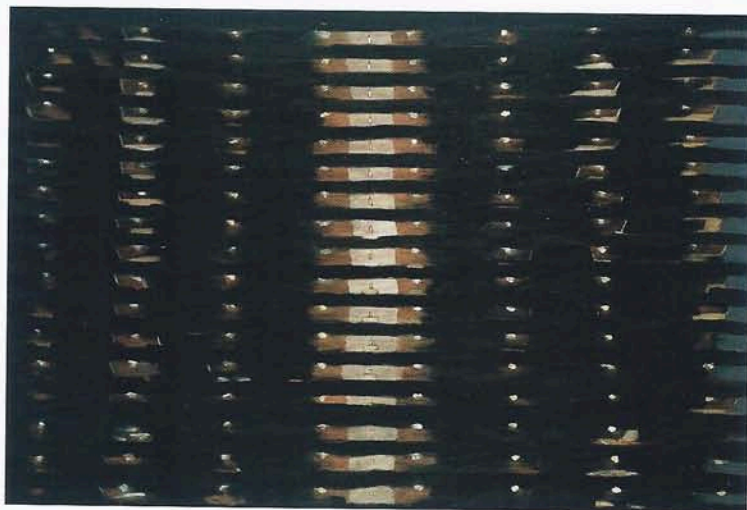
Departure / He Xiangning Art
Museum / Shenzhen

2007

Reversing Horizons /
MOCA Shanghai / Shanghai

2001

318 Opening Show /
Wah Luen Industrial Centre,
Fo Tan / Hong Kong



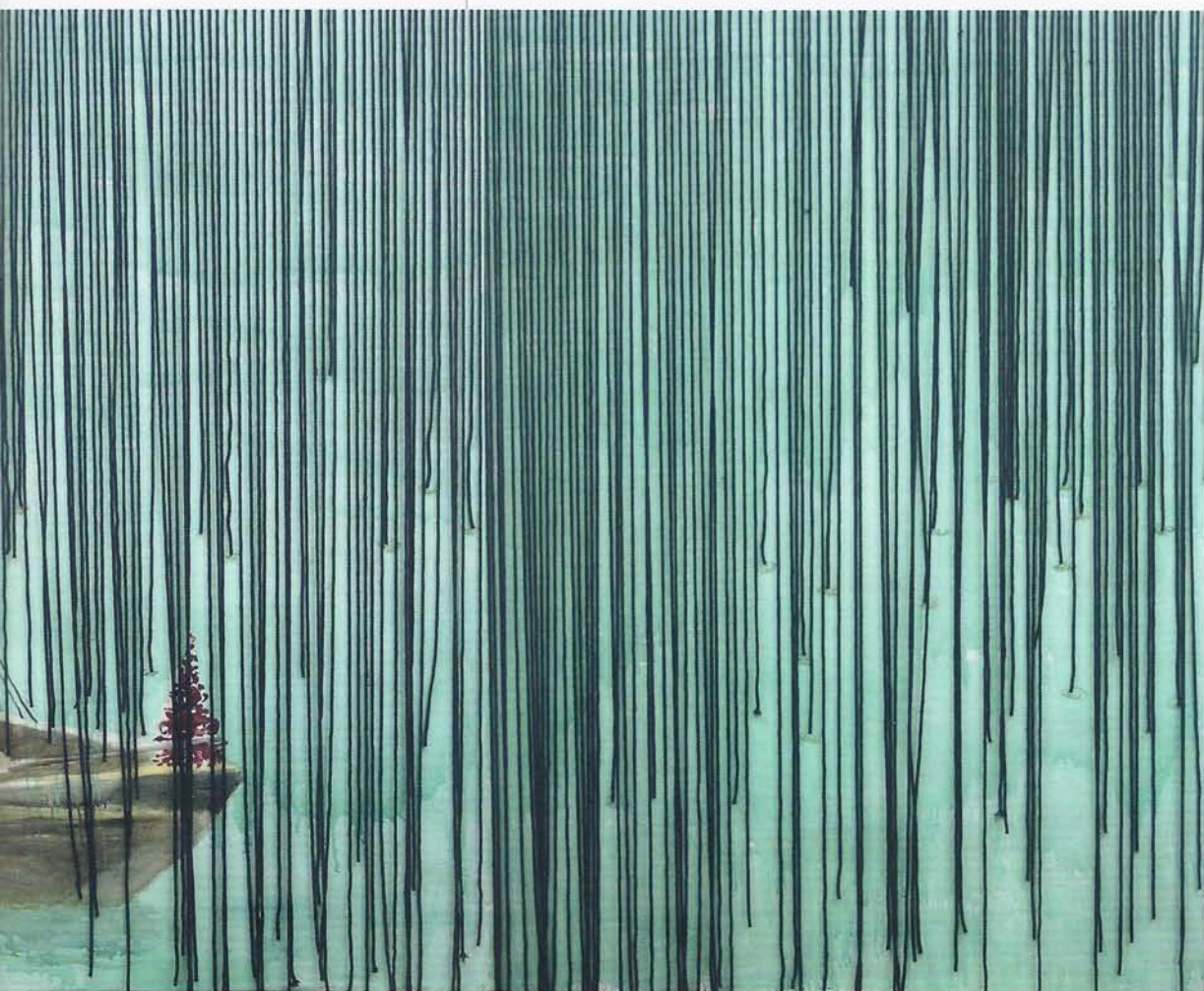
Fotan / 2005 / ink, charcoal, all on wood /
155 × 215 cm



Rain / 2007 / acrylic, charcoal and fabric on
canvas / 160 × 360 cm

**LAM
TUNG-PANG**

I see you / 2005 / nails, acrylics on wood /
120 x 120 cm



The Youngest and Oldest / 2011 / acrylics,
pencil, charcoal, clay, plastic models and image
transferred on plywood / 214x455cm





Selling my Soul / 2010 / charcoal on paper and erasers / dimensions variable

