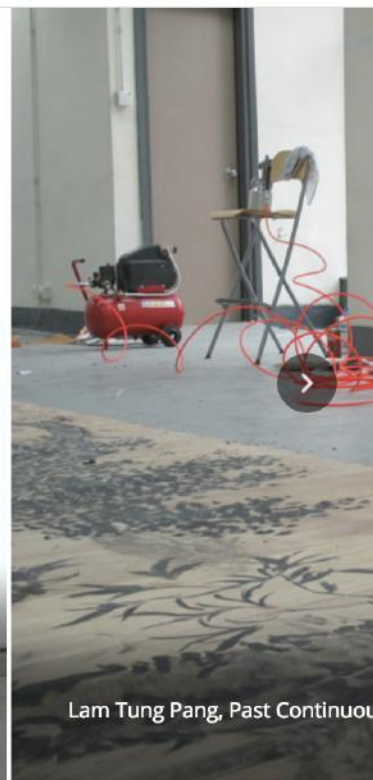


# Studio Visits of Lam Tung Pang — A History of Ambiguity



The Writing Desk 書桌, 2017, made of Ink, paper, acrylics, stainless steel, rocks, plastic model, plants, ceramic bowl, UV ink on wooden panel and wooden furniture. Dimensions: 143 x 120 x 50 cm



Lam Tung Pang, Past Continuou

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Hong Kong artist Lam Tung Pang's studio is on the third floor of an industrial building in Fo Tan. Between here and the lift are rooms piled high with boxes of fruit, and men reposing on the stairs in between moving boxes in or out. The artist remarks that this is where the true spirit of Hong Kong lies and how, despite occasional frustrations with the city, the sight of people doing their work is a source of inspiration. "They do things repetitively, they enjoy it, and then they do it differently. They add their own art and creativity in how they cook, how they pull a box. This is the real meaning of art."

TEXT : Nicholas Stephens

IMAGE : Courtesy of the artist



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Nicholas Stephens lived in Hong Kong for ten years, latterly working for a leading...

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(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/past-continuous-tense-doc-e1495165344556.jpg>)

Lam Tung Pang, Past Continuous Tense, 2011, charcoal, image-transfer and acrylic on plywood, 244 × 1560 × 5 cm.

Within the studio itself, there are other inspirations: the sun streaming in through the high windows, the plants arranged on the windowsill, casting shadows on the floor, and an assortment of mini-trees potted in concrete or sand, dead or living branches plucked from nature, and cut into new form. Lam Tung Pang draws our attention to one which seems to be dancing in the wind. He practises these horticultural incisions as a patient discipline, not dissimilar to ink art, revelling in its irrevocable, decisive finality: "When I cut it, there is no return."



([https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/IMG\\_0742-e1495165680174.jpg](https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/IMG_0742-e1495165680174.jpg))

Lam Tung Pang has dedicated his time over the last year to re-invigorating the Old House in Wong Uk Village, Sha Tin, under the aegis of The Leisure and Cultural Services Department's *Hi! Houses* project. Months of interviewing local historians, meeting local people, wandering through the area to source material and stories, resulted in a recasting of the house into a theatre of sound, video, and material installation, steeped in folk history, imbued with the atmosphere of a bygone Hong Kong. The project finds its echoes in the mini-trees in Lam Tung Pang's studio and the writing desk which was displayed at Galerie Ora-Ora's booth at Art Basel Hong Kong.



(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/The-Writing-Desk-by-Lam-Tung-Pang.jpg>)

Lam Tung Pang, *The Writing Desk* 書桌, 2017, made of Ink, paper, acrylics, stainless steel, rocks, plastic model, plants, ceramic bowl, UV ink on wooden panel and wooden furniture. Dimensions: 143 x 120 x 50 cm

The artist believes in the importance of history. It fits with his questioning mindset and emphasis on gathering information. This, as Lam Tung Pang relates, can make him a frustrating interviewee for media seeking a sharp riposte or quotable sound bite: "I am not the kind of artist these interviewers are looking for. I just think that a thought needs to be fully formed before a sharp answer can be given." Often, it's Hong Kong's relationship with China on which he is asked to opine. "I recognize that in the 1960s and 1970s people felt the unfairness of colonization, they were tricked by the British Government, or kept in a lower status. There was corruption... and suffering. But when I grew up in the 80s and 90s, that was a golden age for Hong Kong. So there were two different experiences, and it causes the tension between the generations... The varying viewpoints also underline the importance of understanding history." One senses that Lam Tung Pang feels comfortable with ambiguity, with dissonance of opinion, and less comfortable with sharp sloganizing that may be considered reactive or ill-informed. "Viewpoints are diverse, there are different ideas, and they co-exist in society."

Within his studio, there are mantras, written casually on the wall. One catches our eye: "The World is too big, my life is little." His other famous maxim is here too: the idea of Chinese-ness as an state of mind rather than an ethnicity or statehood: "I don't want to relate to the ideas of national identity. You shape your own identity by where you live, taking different things from different places... People may look at my works and think I do this because I am Chinese, that's why I make a joke when I say that Chinese is an idea not a nationality."

During our conversation with Lam Tung Pang, clear themes emerge: simplicity, independence, a wish to stay true to the love of painting which made his choice to be an artist inevitable. Lam Tung Pang remarks on the fine line that the artist has to tread, when it comes to promoting his work. He comments on how the art market can recognize hours of self promotion more than hours of patient production. "I enjoy making connections with people and that's part of the branding which is enjoyable. But managing a lot of people or the idea that you will be forgotten if you don't take on larger and larger projects – I dislike this." The studio for him is more than a work place or production centre: "When I get home, I work with the plants and the drawing. It is very direct, it's just me and the panel. After a complex project for the last few months, I come back here and work on these things. And I feel simple... and happy."

Lam Tung Pang contends that he doesn't write proposals, trusting that when one project ends, the next one will find him. Each new project comes with self-interrogation: "When doing big-scale projects, I always ask myself – do I really enjoy this?" This is not isolationism, however. Community engagement is one of the defining characteristics of the artist's character and his art. He

notes how his experience at St. Martin's College in London helped lead him in this direction. In London, he recalls, a stroll to the National Gallery would confront him with masterpieces in an instant. "When I was a child, I had to use my imagination and books." With this disparity in mind, a philosophy began to emerge: the idea that art is what is around us in our everyday lives. On his return to Hong Kong he re-engaged with Chinese art through the university library at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Museum of Art; and his projects took on the flavour of local commitment, meshing art with communities.



(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/201610-MTR610c.jpg>)

Lam Tung Pang, History and Imagination – Whampoa, 2016 (Courtesy of Hong Kong Arts Centre)

The artist brings up two projects that illustrate this theme. At Whampoa MTR station, he created a mural with 40 local primary school children: "I took them there a few years later, when they were in secondary school. I remember that one of the children told me: 'I could never do this kind of naïve painting anymore.' I found this sad, but I was happy that we had captured that time. In this project, the school, where people live, and the MTR are so close. They find their names, the date, and the paintings they did. This is what I wanted to achieve in Hong Kong... after I left London." Thus art becomes both close and real to the people of Hong Kong, like the masterpieces at the National Gallery to St Martin's.



([https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/IMG\\_0387-e1495009414795.jpg](https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/IMG_0387-e1495009414795.jpg))

View of Lam Tung Pang's Studio



(<https://www.cobosocial.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/680The-Sinking-World.jpg>)

Lam Tung-pang, *The Sinking World*, 2014. Acrylics, charcoal, stickers on plywood, 240 x 500 cm.  
(Courtesy of Stylesfeed)

There are signposts for the future dotted around the studio. Wooden panels adorned with *ukiyo-e* style trees in vivid hues are stacked against the wall behind the artist, a sequence of images, following the seasons. "I'm working with purple, orange and pink as a combination for the first time in this plum blossom series... In two months, I've done these five paintings." At the back of the studio there is one image that has taken a lot longer, and was brought upstairs when Lam Tung Pang moved from the first floor to the third. It is part of his "Sinking World" series, a haunting, violent image on huge wooden panels of an Atlas-like man pushing a cart, collecting a topsy-turvy mountain landscape which is falling on top of him. The scene is

lacerated with heavy shards of rain in bolted-on metal and wood. Looking at this arresting image, I start to think of maxims to write on my wall: "With the world on your shoulders, progress will be slow.

### **About the Artist**

Hong Kong born, and currently lives and works in Hong Kong. Lam Tung Pang studied Fine Art at The Chinese University of Hong Kong before undertaking an MA at Central St Martins College of Art, London in 2004. He has been awarded numerous scholarship and awards, including Arts Scholarship from Hong Kong Arts Development Council (2003) and Hong Kong Contemporary Art Biennial Awards (2009).

Lam's work are mostly related to specific situations or social contents and some of them are in monument scale by given a touch of humanity. He has exhibited extensively world-wide and has work in many private and public collections, including Deutsche Bank, Hong Kong Museum of Art and commission work by Hong Kong Legislative Council. In 2012, he was awarded the Asian Cultural Council Fellowship and outstanding contributions to the development of culture and arts by The Secretary for Home Affairs, Hong Kong, and the Award for Best Artist (Visual Arts) of the Hong Kong Arts Development Awards in 2013.

<http://www.lamtungpang.com/> (<http://www.lamtungpang.com/>)

### **Lam Tung-pang x Old House at Wong Uk Village**

Address : Yuen Chau Kok, Sha Tin

Monday, Wednesday to Sunday : 9am — 1pm and 2pm — 5pm Closed on Tuesdays

\*Public Tours : 11am on Wednesday and 4pm on Thursday

Exhibition until : 9.7.2017

Free admission

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**Nicholas Stephens** is from London and has lived in Hong Kong for the last nine years, where he works for a leading Hong Kong gallery, specializing in contemporary ink. His articles on diverse aspects of the Hong Kong arts scene have been published in "Art Hong Kong". A graduate in Modern Languages (European ones unfortunately!), Nicholas has authored translations of novels and plays by writers including Stefan Zweig and Hugo von Hofmannsthal.