

Caroline Ha Thuc

Specialized in Asian contemporary art, Caroline Ha Thuc is a French Hong Kong based art writer and curator. She published 'Nouvel Art Contemporain Japonais' (2012), 'Contemporary Art in Hong Kong' (2013), and recently 'After 2000: Contemporary Art in China' (2015), both in French and English languages. She regularly writes for different magazines in France (Art Press) and Hong Kong. As a curator, she focuses on promoting dialogue between artists from different cultures.



Translated into Chinese by Phoebe Cheng // Image courtesy of Jaffa Lam

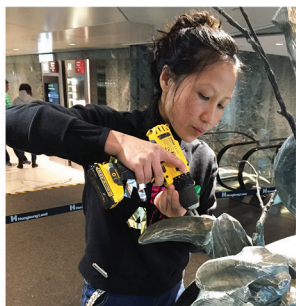
STUDIO'S CONVERSATION SERIES

JAFFA LAM

工作室藝術對話系列—林嵐



Jaffa Lam
*One Country Two Systems, One Bed
Two Dreams*
2015, light box, recycled umbrella fabric
from Umbrella Movement, wood



Jaffa Lam 林嵐

Jaffa Lam received her art education in The Chinese University of Hong Kong. She specialise in large-scale site-specific works of mixed-media sculptures and installations that explores local culture, history, society and current affairs.

林嵐畢業於香港中文大學修讀藝術系，主力創作大型混合媒介雕塑作品及裝置，探討文化歷史、社會與時事等議題。

'Studio Conversations' is a series based on in-depth conversations between Hong Kong-based artists and Caroline Ha Thuc.

Stepping back from headline news and day-to-day issues, they will freely debate about art in a very wide sense, sharing new ideas, questioning the process of creation and developing critical thinking. The aim is also to try to reveal what might lay behind an artwork: a diversity of intentions, aborted projects, doubts, gestations...

Born in China in 1973 and migrated to Hong Kong in 1985, Jaffa Lam is a creator of social sculptures in the same mould as Joseph Beuys. She argues for a socially aware and community-based art and is as interested in creating beautiful objects as she is in stimulating social relationships. Working hand in hand with local communities and actively engaged in the education field, she represents one of the most prominent figure of the Hong Kong art scene.

Caroline Ha Thuc: You came to Hong Kong from China at the age of 12. What led you to art?

Jaffa Lam: I did not choose art, I just felt more confident in studying it at school. At that time, I wanted to be the best, probably due to a lack of recognition as a new migrant in the city. But I quickly realised that being the best in art did not mean anything.

From the beginning, it seems that you favour a socially conscious and community-based art. Where does your social engagement come from?

Social art has become 'trendy' and there is a risk of confusion among all those new practices. I

在《工作室藝術對話》裡，Caroline Ha Thuc 和一班香港藝術家深入探討藝術的各個層面。

他們將報章頭條和日常瑣事擱下，展開一場廣闊的藝術思辯，交換新想法，挑戰創作的過程、發展批判思考，以揭露藝術品真像出發，不管那是繁複的意圖、半途擱棄的計劃、疑惑、還是孕育中的思想...

林嵐生於 1973 年，1985 年移民香港。和 Joseph Beuys 相近，她致力創作「社會雕塑」，並提倡社區為本、為社會關注的藝術。在她而言，創作漂亮的物件和建設帶衝擊性的社會關係同樣重要。現在，她經常和本地團體合作，並活躍於教育界，可以說是香港藝壇其中一個最具影響力的人。

Ha Thuc: 你 12 歲從中國大陸來到香港。是什麼令你走上藝術這條路呢？

林：我沒有選擇藝術，只是當時覺得在學校上這門課較有信心。那時我希望成為最優秀的人，或許是因為作為新移民我較缺乏認同。不過沒多久，我就發現在藝術表現最優秀根本算不得甚麼。

由一開始，你就好像傾向創作一些具社會意識和圍繞社區的藝術。這個社會參與的主題是怎樣發展出來的呢？

社會藝術已然成為一種「時尚」，而新的創作隱含混亂的危機。我朝這個方向創作已有頗長的日子。最初我甚至不為意那跟社會參與有關。在學時，我只覺得學費由香港政府資助，後來就希望作出回饋。2003 年 SARS 爆發，我強烈感受到集體哀傷和焦慮的力量，所以決定要回應這種感受。後來因著藝術家駐住計畫，我移居到台灣沒多久就

have worked in this direction for a very long time. And at the beginning, I did not know that what I was doing was related to social engagement. As a student, I was just aware that my education fees were supported by the Hong Kong government. Therefore at a certain point, I wished to pay back. During SARS in 2003, I felt strongly the power of collective sadness and anxiety, and I decided to respond to this feeling. Shortly after moving to Taiwan for an artist-in-residency programme, I began to meet the people there, local people from the neighbourhood: I needed to find an idea for my work, at minimum cost. Looking for material in a trash station, I met the shopkeeper and started to listen to his stories, and then stories from the local community. I realised how important to me it was, to be able to pay attention to those people, and to move outside the art circle. When I came back to Hong Kong, I began to connect local NGOs with local and overseas artists. These NGOs had the network but also the trust of the people, so they were able to facilitate the connection between the communities and the art world. At that time, there were very few artists dealing with social issues.

Since 2009 you have been working with an association of former workers of the Hong Kong textile industry who were made redundant during the recession. These projects were undertaken under the shield of what you called 'Micro Economy' project, integrating closely garment and crate wood workers in the production of artworks. What did you aim at?

My idea was to raise people's awareness of the process of production and of discard, and to question the 'useful' and 'useless'. It is also a way to remind people about this working class, which once upon a time supported the Hong Kong economy.

What is your relationship with these women? What is their own relation to art? How do they define it?

They called me 'Ms Lam' in the beginning. Now they call me 'Ah Laam'. We share the life experience of cooking, healthy diet, dating, kids' education... As I also have spent a lot of time solving their family problems and various headaches, they finally do believe that 'artist' is not a stupid kind of profession. These experiences change their vision of art. The daughter of a seamstress has actually become one of my current students. That shows how they perceive contemporary art now.

Isn't there a risk of paternalism in all these?

As we are in such a close relationship, I never worry about paternalism. They have the skills, I have the ideas. So we have a clear division of work and we do learn a lot from each other. I used to work in a local garment factory in the 1980s. I guess it helped, as we share the same memory of what the former garment and handicraft industries in Hong Kong were.

When you present your work to the public, how do you present them, and how do they wish to be presented?

I use 'Jaffa LAM Collective' rather than the term of name. I treat them as collaborator/fabricators. For the public interview, I will show their picture rather than mine. Some of the work will have their label sewed. I never sign my name on work in my own.

Do they realise you are 'fighting' for them to be heard?

開始和附近的居民交流，因為我需要用最少的資金尋找作品題材。在垃圾站尋找創作物料時，我遇見了一個商舖老闆，開始聆聽他的故事，然後是關於社區的故事。我意識到，將注意力放在那些人身上、從藝術區走出來，對我來說意義重大。回到香港之後，我開始聯絡本地的非政府組織和外地藝術家。那些組織既有網絡，亦有口碑，所以能夠促進社區和藝術界的合作。當年會關注社會議題的藝術家還不多。

2009年開始，你一直和經濟衰弱時期遭遣散的紡織廠從業員合作。那些計劃將紡織業和卡板工人納入藝術創作中，是你說的「微經濟」。你當初帶著甚麼期望？

我希望引起大眾對創作和棄置過程的意識，並挑戰何謂「有用」和「無用」。那同時是對公眾的提醒，他們要記得工人階級，因為那些人曾經支持過香港的經濟。

你和那些女性的關係是怎樣的？她們又和藝術有甚麼相干？藝術對她來說是甚麼？

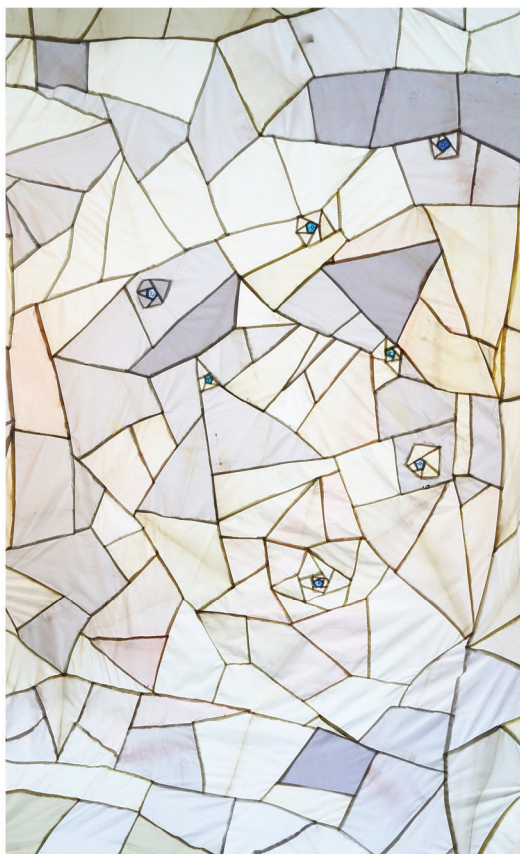
他們開頭以「林小姐」稱呼我，現在則叫我「阿嵐」。我們有很多相近的經驗，像是煮食、健康餐單、約會、教育小孩...因為我花過不少時間解決她們的家庭問題和煩惱，久而久之，她們終於相信「藝術家」不是個鬧著玩的專業。這些經驗都令他們對藝術改觀。有個女裁縫的女兒甚至成為了我的學生。這都顯示她們現在怎樣理解當代藝術。

在這中間不是會有家長式教育的風險嗎？

我們的關係很好，所以我從來沒有擔心過家長式影響的問題。他們有的是技能，我有的是點子。所以我們有很不錯的分工，在彼此身上也學到很多。我在1980年代在本地一間紡織廠待過，所以大概那段經歷也幫助到我，因為我們對香港早年的紡織和手工業有共同回憶。

你向觀眾發布作品時，會怎樣介紹她們呢？她們又希望用甚麼形式面對觀眾？

我用了「林嵐合作社」而沒有用個人的名字。我視她們為合作者或製作人。在公眾訪問



Jaffa Lam
Starry night by day
2015, recycled umbrella fabric

I'm neither a fighter, nor a social activist. I would not say that I am their voice out. But rather that I treat them as one of the bridges to reach the society/community. I respect them as my working partners. On the other hand, there are so many groups being ignored by society... What I do is only raising attention to those 'invisible' people.

What would be then, for you, the difference between an artist and a social activist?

I could not take the pressure to be a social activist, and will not be good at it. I believe in the division of labour. Everyone has expertise in certain areas... I am using my own expertise and position to bring art and social issues to new fields and attention. For instance, opening property developers to the idea of including 'good' art in their projects.

Do you believe art can - or should - educate people? In that case, do you wish to act both with the people you are working with, and the general public?

Of course, for me art works hand in hand with education. I am trying not to create art only for art's sake.

I am expanding free art education for the public through a monthly free art magazine writing and weekly radio show, on top of my work as a teacher. Yet I have no ambition to be a great educator, nor do I have any specific vision about what a 'good' education could be. I guess it has to do more with developing critical thinking so that everyone can choose his or her own path.

Socially engaged art is often created at the expense of its aesthetical dimension: the process of the creation matters more than the final 'product'. How do you handle that?

I am concerned about aesthetics too, as this is what people will remember. The outcome of our process does matter: those tangible objects could be perceived as the evidence of my practice. It is also how we differentiate ourselves from social

中，我一般都讓他們出鏡而自己
不露面。有些作品繡有她們
的標誌，而我從來不在自己的
作品上簽名。

他們有意識到你為了讓她們
的聲音得到社會注意而「奮
鬥」的嗎？

我既不是戰士，亦不是參與
社會運動的人。我不會說自己
成為她們聲音的出口，但我將
她們當成我是接觸社區 / 社
會的橋樑。作為工作的夥伴，
我十分尊重她們，只是另一邊
廂，社會上也是在有很多被遺
忘的群體……我做的只是讓
那些「隱形」的人得到注意。

那麼對你來說，藝術家和社
運人士有甚麼分別？

我不能承受社運的壓力，亦不
能勝任這項工作。我對分工合
作有信心。每個人都有擅長的
範疇……我用自己的專長和
地位將藝術和社會問題帶到
新的領域、喚起關注。像是鼓
勵地產商將「好」的藝術納入
發展項目中。

你相信藝術能夠、或者說應
該，教育大眾嗎？在這方面，
你希望雙管齊下，既教育和你
合作的人，又教育觀眾嗎？

Jaffa Lam
Dust Tree I
2011, recycled crate wood,
abandoned chair, bulbs



workers' projects, as we care about the creative process and the beauty of the work.

You mainly work with recycled materials, in line with your commitment. How do you find the material? Paradoxically, I found that it is sometimes harder (or more expensive) to find used material.

Yes, recycled material is sometimes more expensive than new ones, and using it also often requires more work. But the purpose is not to find the cheapest way to create artwork. It is to commit myself together with the workers and the community, to create collaborative works. There are plenty of secondary shops and I know where to find what I need. These materials have a strong connection to my personal life experience as well, since I remember myself as a child wearing only second-hand clothes.

Being socially and environmentally so deeply

當然希望。在我而言，藝術和教育不能分割。我一直希望不要單單為藝術而創作。現時，我在擔任教師以外，亦通過在免費月刊寫專欄和每週一次出席電台節目擴展免費藝術教育。然而我沒有想過成為偉大的教育家，亦不敢說自己知道何謂「好」的教育。我猜更重要的是培養獨立思考，讓每個人都能夠選擇自己的道路。

參與式藝術很多時在創作過程犧牲了美學，因為過程比最後的「成品」重要。你怎樣拿捏呢？



Jaffa Lam
Meditation Tent
2011, recycled umbrella fabric, sewing
team of the Hong Kong Women Workers'
Association

engaged might bring it a lot of constraints to your creativity. Where, or how, do you find the way to renew yourself?

Yes, you are right. But I enjoy my path and got my own luck. Always there are some different projects knocking at my head and pushing me to do something else. Yet, I must say I have to sometimes adapt myself, working with the material I have. For instance, if there are not enough umbrellas abandoned, and not enough fabric, I will try to be creative about this lack, rather than buying new fabric. I also need to compromise when I have to fulfil the requirements of some public clients such as MTR or property developers. I would face maintenance issues, fire regulations, public complaints and etc. The image of artworks made from recycled material is still very negative. People worry about the maintenance, and about the costs of it. They do not perceive the educational dimension of the work and continue to think short-term.

Staying away from the art market is also for

我也很著重美學，處理得好，才會在觀眾腦中留下印象。所以創作過程的成果是重要的，而且實質的物件也可以看成我創作的證據。這也說明我們和社會工作者的分別，因為我們很注重創作過程和作品的美感。

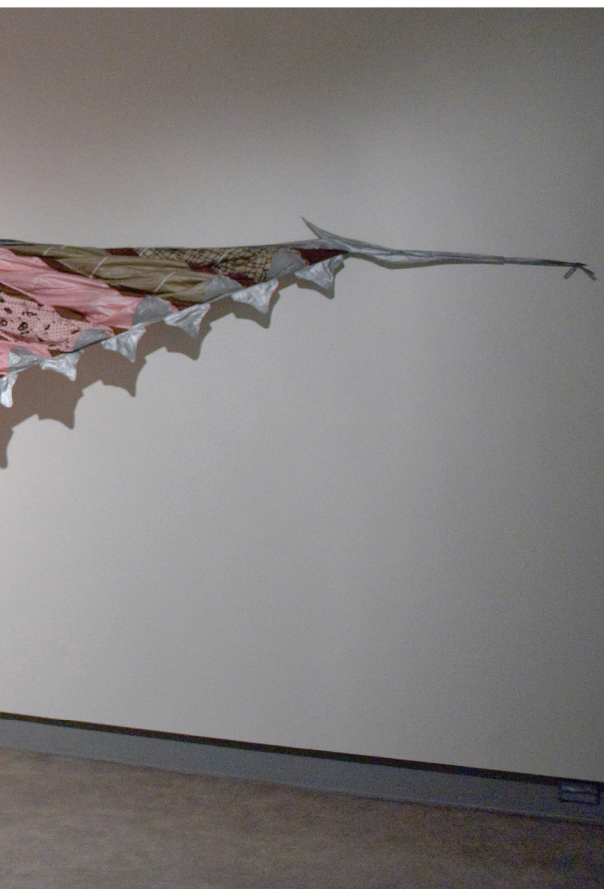
你一般都用回收材料創作，貫徹社會責任。那麼你是怎樣找到物料的？頗弔詭的是，我發現要找一些用過的材料有時更難，甚至更昂貴。

對呀，回收物料有時相較新的材料要貴，而且要好好利用它們，需要花多點功夫。但創作的目的並不是用最便宜的方式完成作品，而是投入在工

you a key issue. With your 'Micro Economy Project', you have been developing an alternative system where everyone can share the outcome of his or her work. After so many years, how would you evaluate it?

I have to confess, that I teach art. That means I sell 'art knowledge'. From teaching three-year-old kids at the beginning, to now when I am teaching various age-bracket students. That is the main way I could make money from art knowledge selling. That is also an alternative way to survive and make art as I wish, staying away from the market and sponsor purpose.

Therefore I won't have any mechanism to assess this system: projects come one by one, and I move on. People agree to pay the workers with whom I am collaborating a good salary, meaning they believe in what I believe. Otherwise they would ask me to employ



cheaper workers from mainland China...

Working as a teacher is indeed a way to keep your independence. Do you think all artists should rely on alternative income in order not to be corrupted by the market, and by its trends or fashion?

I would say, that's a way. But I have to say, one needs to be committed as a devoted art teacher. Otherwise I do not see the difference between teaching and selling art for the market.

I treat my teaching as a life exploration, learning experience from my students, from teaching, and research. Those elements enrich my art creation. For me, teaching is not a separate job. It's part of my art career.

Do you have any vision, any dream for the future?

My vision is that everyone whether poor or rich has proper art education.

人和社區當中，一同創作。我在外面認識很多二手店，可以容易找到需要的東西。那些材料和我的個人經驗都有緊密的連繫，因為我記得小時候向來只會穿著二手衣服。

要對社會和環境付出這麼多，必定為創作帶來限制。你在哪裡，或說怎樣，找到方法突破自己？

你說得一點也不錯，不過我很享受這條路，而且我也挺有運氣的。我腦裡面有很多靈感，經常被這些念頭催促動工。不過，我有時也要調整自己，用現成的材料創作。例如是沒有足夠的舊雨傘時，不夠布料，我會用創意解決問題，而不會購買新的布料。但地鐵公司和地產發展商相關項目，為了符合客戶要求，有時也需要讓步。除此之外要面對還有維修問題、防火條例、公眾投訴等等。大眾對回收物品製作藝術品的印象仍然很差。很多人會擔心保養問題、擔心要花很多錢等短期困難，而甚少考慮作品長遠的教育果效。

和藝術市場保持距離也是你一貫的作風。你用「微經濟計劃」發展出另類的系統，讓人人都可以分享創作的成果。過了這麼多年，你又怎樣評估計劃的成效呢？

我得承認，我有教藝術。也就是說，我售賣「藝術知識」。剛開始的時候我只教授三歲孩童，現在學生的年齡層則很闊。這是我出售藝術知識的主要收入來源，也是我期望的生存和創作方式，好讓我不需要顧慮市場和贊助商。

亦因為這樣，我不會有任何機制去量度這個系統。完了一個項目，我就會開始另一項活動。其他人願意為我的工作伙伴提供不錯的資金，證明我們有共同信念。要不，他們大概會叫我花少一點、從大陸聘請工人吧……

擔任老師的確可以讓你保持獨立。那麼，你覺得藝術家都應該依賴發售藝術品以外的收入，不讓市場和潮流趨勢玷污嗎？

那是其中一種方法。不過我也必須補充，熱誠的教師必須付出很多。不然我實在看不出教授藝術知識和在市場出售作品有甚麼分別。

你對未來有任何願景和夢想嗎？

我的願景是人不論貧富都可以接受正式的藝術教育。