Having lived in Hong Kong almost all my life, I seem to be in close contact with customs and common practices carried out for the dead. Things like paper offerings have always fascinated me, and I have started collecting them since 2002. Over the years, I have also enjoyed reading about the 10 Courts of Hell and ghost festivals, and sometimes fantasized presenting these narratives in clay.

My very early acquaintance with hell dated back to my childhood, the few times when my parents took my two sisters and me to the Tiger Balm Gardens of How Par Mansion. I still remember vividly what I saw standing in front of the picturesque cave with red walls relief of the Ten Courts of Hell, where I could see the deceased went through the passages of being tried, condemned and reincarnated—death guards cut people's tongues, throwing people into boiling oil, chaining people around burning poles, etc. Blood, violence, torture brutality. People were punished in their afterlife because of their greed and bad deeds, as my parents told me.

I don't remember if I had any nightmares after each visit, nor do I know if these horrific, stunning scenes had any influence on my moral sense growing up, but there has always been a recurring picture in my mind—a little girl standing in front of the concrete reliefs looking amused but in awe in men and women and women were topless, and many of the condemned were naked—the sight filled her with sensations and incomprehension. The little girl in her childhood innocence, experienced but a bewilderment of death, sexuality, and violence appearing all at once. I never knew if this little girl has ever grown up, but she seems to be living within me all the time. Approaching the world of my life, I feel an urge to meet her face to face, taking her little hand, the way my mom did to me, and revisit the 10 Courts of Hell together, then I can gladly say goodbye to her, and would have no regrets.

In this exhibition, I have created scenarios of trial and punishment as inspired by the Ten Courts of Hell in the How Par Mansion. I have taken it further to include my own fantasies of scenes of the inferno with present day reference as well as re-create and re-contextualize these scenes that highlight life under the world. I am interested in how the trend in the kind of commodities produced as paper offerings from year to year has almost convinced me that, after trial and punishment, yet before reincarnation, there might very well be a plateau in the afterlife, which much resembles that of ours in this world.

I believe what is presented in my work bears some relevance to the world and our society in the present day; though I see the exhibition mainly as a revisiting of my childhood experience, a relief to my long time obsession and my homage to the How Par Mansion.

The staging of this exhibition is collaborated with Mr. Ng Ho Chi, who takes care of space design and lighting direction to enhance the overall effect and atmosphere in the presentation.

Rosanna Li

Rosanna Li studied ceramics in Hong Kong and the UK. From 1990 to 2010, she taught at the School of Design of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her lifelike ceramic figures always fill us with amusement and delight. Therefore, both her ceramic works and public sculptures delight everyone by viewers.

Ng Ho Chi

Ng Ho Chi graduated from the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London, UK. In 2005. His main focus is to challenge spatial conventions and material development by creating alternative and meaningful spatial experience.

更多與陶藝家及創作伙伴

More about the Ceramic Artist and Creative Partner
"Hello!" — Rosanna Li's ghosts from the past

Having grown up in Hong Kong, Rosanna Li is not someone who observes taboos. She is used to all the funeral parlours, funeral services and paper offering shops in her neighbourhood, and enjoys collecting paper-craft items, especially paper footwears. So it is a surprise to learn that the fearless Rosanna could be terrified by the vivid reliefs of scenes of hell in the Tiger Balm Gardens during a visit to the Haw Par Mansion as a young girl. This childhood trauma never left her, but it also became a source of inspiration decades later, leading her to create the large-scale ceramic installation "Hello!".

This time, Rosanna's trademark characters — ceramic figures of fat guys and plump ladies which have won her a firm following — star in scene after scene of nightmarish terrors: they get disembowelled, their tongues get chopped off, their eyes get plucked out, their bodies get sawed in half, and their chests get crushed by rocks. Thankfully, these folks still have the chance to enjoy a bowl of Hell Ramen and re-watch Ghost before drinking the Tea of Forgetfulness. They even get to enjoy beauty services from the Black and White Messengers of Hell before they get in line for reincarnation. Rosanna, being the ingenuous artist she is, is not only replicated the "Ten Courts of Hell" that was imprinted in her memory, but also infused plenty of modern elements into her work.

With beautiful workmanship, she created scenes of Hell that will no doubt draw some knowing smiles.

Rosanna is used to designing, creating and setting up her artworks all by herself, moulding a unique world with her nimble hands. In this exhibition, she invited Ng Hoi-chi, a student she met while teaching at the School of Design of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, as her creative partner. Hoi-chi worked on the space and lighting design to enhance the overall effect of the presentation.

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