

Teaching

Tsang Kin-Wah

ARTIST

TSANG Kin-Wah

(zung geen-wah)

曾建華



Tsang Kin-Wah

BORN

1974, Shantou, China

LIVES & WORKS

Hong Kong

THEMES

**History
Narrative**

“Text is also a visual language. Text and image, they have certain kinds of relationships that I can play with. That’s how I start to make some text, which actually looks like patterns.”¹

ART MEDIUMS

**Mixed Media
Film and Video
Installation**

ABOUT

Tsang Kin-Wah was born in 1976 in China and immigrated with his family to Hong Kong in 1982. As a “mainlander” living in Hong Kong during its years as a British colony, he was seen as an outsider and grew up with a conflicted sense of identity that still influences his work.² In 2002 Tsang left Hong Kong for London to pursue a master’s degree in book art and began combining texts and images in his work. Over time Tsang started experimenting with video projection as a way to focus on how text could move or flow as part of an experiential space. Tsang reflected, “When a work is projected on the floor, viewers can actually interact with the projections and become part of the installation.”³

In the End Is the Word (2016) is a multichannel, site-specific installation comprised of edited found footage, animated text, and atmospheric sound. The film begins with a quiet image of the sea. A lone ship appears after a minute, prompting a battalion of other boats to follow and eventually intercede with projectiles and explosions. Eight minutes into the film, waves of words start to flow forward from the horizon and are project onto the gallery floor. The tide of words slows and loops back to the calm image of the sea.

The subject of the work deepens the significance of this repeated narrative. The film is created from found Internet footage of the Diaoyu Islands (called the Senkaku Islands in Japan), which has been disputed territory between China and Japan for over a century. These uninhabited islands are

important because they are in a strategic position and reflect the competition for maritime military strength among nations in Asia. *In the End Is the Word* reflects on the never-ending cycle of events and history. By editing the footage with image and text, Tsang suggests that this localized struggle represents a larger history of war and trauma, all of which is destined to repeat. At the same time, it also points to the constructed nature of history: when the physical experience of an event ends and memory fades, narratives are all that remain to create, disseminate, and contest the past.

1 “Tsang Kin-Wah: *Tales of Our Time*,” Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, November 3, 2016, <https://www.guggenheim.org/video/tsang-kin-wah-ales-of-our-time>.

2 “[Hong Kong] locals refer to people from Guangdong as mainlanders, reserving the term ‘Hong Kongers’ for those born in Hong Kong.” Stella Fong, “The Invisible Struggle of Tsang Kin-Wah,” *LEAP* (Art Basel in Hong Kong Special), 2016, pp. 30–32. Also available on the artist’s website: <http://www.tsangkinwah.com/upload/215586/documents/E0D1E9F41D92199E.pdf>.

3 Angel Li, “Tsang Kin Wah, His Constant Search for the Truth,” *A.M. Post 100* (November 2013), pp. 10–15. Also available on the artist’s website: <http://www.tsangkinwah.com/upload/215586/documents/295CEF9AE647055B.pdf>.



Tsang Kin-Wah, *In The End Is The Word*, 2016. Six-channel video installation, with sound, 10 min., 10 sec. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Collection 2016.41

View and Discuss

→ Go to tsangkinwah.com/work-in-the-end-is-the-word to watch a ten-minute video of *In the End Is the Word* (2016).

What happens in the beginning of the film?
What happens in the end?

→ This artwork uses archival footage of the Diaoyu Islands. Situated between mainland China and Japan, these islands have a long history of conflict due to their strategic location in the East China Sea.

How does this contextual information add to or change the narrative of the film?

→ Look at images of the site-specific installation *In the End Is the Word*. A site-specific installation is a mixed-media artwork designed for and with a focus on a specific space.

Why do you think this artwork is considered a site-specific installation? What do you notice about the room in which it was shown at the Guggenheim?

→ In this installation, Tsang projects lines of text that flow outward from the film and into the space of the viewer.

Read this text on Tsang's website: tsangkinwah.com/writing-in-the-end-is-the-word. How does this text relate to the narrative in the film?

Classroom Activities

Design a Calligram

Tsang often uses text and image in designs that are inspired by calligrams, images produced from arranging typed, handwritten, or calligraphic font.

Show your students different examples of calligrams and ask them to create their own, using the following steps:

- 1 Find a pattern or image. Tsang is inspired by images with historical or cultural significance.
- 2 Choose a text. Tsang uses a mix of original and found text, e.g., excerpts from a book, poems, or songs. He also often mixes languages, combining Chinese characters and English letters.
- 3 Arrange the letters, words, or sentences in your text to form your pattern or image. Be experimental with repetition, punctuation, and negative space!
- 4 Decide on the final format of your calligram. Will the final artwork be produced with pen and paper or typed on the computer? What size, type, and color of font(s) will you choose?

Outsider Perspectives

Tsang's experiences as an immigrant and outsider have inspired him to question historical narratives. He said, "My work is focused on inclusion and exclusion, partly because I was an immigrant myself, but also because of a racist experience I had in London many years ago."⁴

Choose a historical event that you are familiar with. Decide on a culturally dominant narrative about it with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Think about this event again from a minority perspective and rewrite with a different beginning, middle, and end.

⁴ Masha Rademakers, "A Scream for Tolerance—Tsang Kin-Wah's Canadian Debut," *Source*, May 30, 2017, <http://thelastsource.com/en/2017/05/29/a-scream-for-tolerance-tsang-kin-wahs-canadian-debut/>.

Classroom Activities

Explore Tsang Kin-Wah's Art Practice

Watch a video on the about Tsang Kin-Wah's art practice on the Guggenheim website: guggenheim.org/video/tsang-kin-wah-ales-of-our-time.



Tsang Kin-Wah working in his studio, Hong Kong, 2016

What are the common themes that Tsang explores in his art practice? How is Tsang's artwork influenced by history, politics, or religion? How is *In the End Is the Word* related to these themes or influences?

Resources

Websites

- Tsang's Website <http://www.tsangkinwah.com/>

Videos

- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. "Artist Profile: Tsang Kin-Wah." November 3, 2016. <https://www.guggenheim.org/video/tsang-kin-wah-tales-of-our-time>.

Audio

- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. "*In the End Is the Word and No(thing/Fact) Outside* by Tsang Kin-Wah." October 28, 2016. <https://www.guggenheim.org/audio/track/in-the-end-is-the-word-and-nothing-fact-outside-by-tsang-kin-wah>.

Articles

- Volk, Katherine. "*In the End Is the Word: Tsang Kin-Wah.*" *Canvas*, September/October 2018. See: <http://www.tsangkinwah.com/upload/215586/documents/8B951F9EDD938EBD.pdf>.
- Tsang Kin-Wah. Interview by Enoch Cheng. *Asia Art Archive*, July 1, 2009. <https://aaa.org.hk/en/ideas/ideas/interview-with-tsang-kin-wah>.
- Tsui, Enid. "From Venice to Vancouver, Hong Kong Artist Tsang Kin-Wah Spreads Words of Wisdom." *South China Morning Post*, October 25, 2016. <https://www.scmp.com/culture/arts-entertainment/article/2039508/venice-vancouver-hong-kong-artist-tsang-kin-wah-spreads>.

Books

- Weng, Xiaoyu and Hou Hanru, eds. *Tales of Our Time*. Exh. cat. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2016.

Visit guggenheim.org/teachingmaterials for high-resolution images, audio, and video, as well as additional historical and contextual information about this artist and others featured in *Teaching Modern and Contemporary Asian Art*.

Note: On page 2, the artist's surname is capitalized to differentiate it from his given name. Colloquial phonetic pronunciations are included, rather than versions in the standard International Phonetic Alphabet, to help teachers pronounce names that may be unfamiliar.

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