

WONG SHUN KIT – FLOATING IDENTITY

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As it headed towards 1997, Hong Kong was looking to ensure its political, economic and cultural identity, in the face of China. This identity is not, however, as obvious as it might seem and gives rise to frequent debates, including one relating to the very nature of Hong Kong identity. This subject is at the very heart of the work produced by many artists, including Wong Shun Kit, who, by virtue of being an immigrant artist from China, benefits from having experience from two sides. In his opinion, Hong Kong identity is “floating”, a concept that he has attempted to develop since 1992 through several successive installations grouped around four basic themes - *identity, space, communication, power*.

Floating Identity, an installation erected at Hong Kong Polytechnic University's swimming pool, showed how the physical area of Hong Kong has changed over time, using three maps from 1840, 1850 and 1897 that illustrated the expansion of the British territory. All the significant dates from the territory's history were marked on the diving boards, whilst in the sky, floating here and there, were the people of Hong Kong. This theme was also used in *Art Attack*, which was displayed at the residence of the German Consul. In this installation, above a map of Hong Kong and in a sky thick with flags and foreign passports, floated kite-like men, each having a small map of the territory by way of a heart, and below them, an empty and abandoned nest, the confusion of an uprooted population.

In *Basic Space* presented in August 1995 at the Hong Kong Arts Centre, Wong characterised Hong Kong's new legal framework, the *Basic Law*. He covered the walls and the ground with it, and in the middle, in a glass case, he enthroned a pure gold copy of this *Basic Law*, which, from then on, was to become a sacred and steadfast point of reference for the area of Hong Kong. An area where communication seemed impossible, as depicted in his *Hong Kong chessboard*. With one half resembling a Chinese chessboard and the other half a western chessboard, it symbolised the impossibility of the meeting between China and Hong Kong where the rules and the way of life belong to very different orders.

But one of his most expressive works is that which was exhibited in the 1995 exhibition *A.cul.turation* at Hong Kong City Hall, where Wong characterised what the people of Hong Kong would face in 1997. Dominating the scene were three wood and steel giants, and below them, a maze in the shape of a map of Hong Kong, where a tiny humanoid robot went round and round tirelessly. The three giant gods represented the three symptoms of strong political power - *destruction, development* and *preservation*. According to his own words, Wong drew his inspiration for this work from the monumental size of Egyptian statues and the various faces of a Hindu goddess who could be “good, a creator, a destroyer or a

conserver“ all at the same time. But here the image is modified in favour of political power - “*A power endowed with three faces, and one never knows which one will be shown. An unstable identity, China is like this, and this is what the ordinary Hong Kong man, lost in his maze, must face up to.*“

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