



# In Memory of Four Deceased Visual Arts Practitioners

Compiled by: Joanna Lee

Nigel Cameron, Hiram To, Wan Qingli and Alfonso Wong, four practitioners who had been closely related to the Hong Kong visual arts scene, passed away in 2017. The *Yearbook* has compiled concise biographies below in memory of their achievement in the arts.

## Information:

- Local newspapers and online news portals
- University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong
- Asia Art Archive

## Nigel Cameron (1921-2017)

Born in Edinburgh, England, Cameron was a dentist by profession. He left England in 1956 on an around-the-world tour while taking photography commission from magazines. In 1957, he arrived Beijing and was granted a travel pass by Zhou Enlai, allowing him to travel around China.<sup>1</sup> He came to Hong Kong in 1962 and had been active in the Hong Kong arts scene since then, wearing the hats of art historian, art critic, curator, art dealer, etc. Cameron was made an honorary adviser to the Hong Kong Museum of Art in 1965 and an art adviser to Hongkong Land. He was the art critic for *South China Morning Post* between 1972 and 1994.

Cameron was a highly productive art critic. His art reviews brought to the public's attention of the then emerging artists, including Hon Chi-fun, Wucius Wong, Luis Chan, Cheung Yee, Ha Bik-chuen, Douglas Bland, Rosamond Brown, Lui Fung-ngar Eddie, Tong King-sum, Irene Chou and Lui Chun-kyong.<sup>2</sup> His art criticism is now among the library collection of Asia Art Archive. Cameron's publications include:

- *To the East a Phoenix* (1960)
- *Peking: A Tale of Three Cities* (1965)
- *Barbarians and Mandarins – Thirteen Centuries of Western Travelers in China* (1970)
- *Hong Kong: The Cultured Pearl* (1978)
- *An Illustrated History of Hong Kong* (1991)

Nigel Cameron passed away in Hong Kong in February, 2017, at the age of 96.

1 "Obituary: Nigel Cameron, Hong Kong art critic and forthright advocate for a fledgling generation of artists" *South China Morning Post*, February 16, 2017, [www.scmp.com/culture/arts-entertainment/article/2071357/obituary-nigel-cameron-hong-kong-art-critic-and](http://www.scmp.com/culture/arts-entertainment/article/2071357/obituary-nigel-cameron-hong-kong-art-critic-and).

2 Ditto.

## Hiram To (1964-2017)

Born in Hong Kong, To started making his art in the late 1980s. He had once lived in Scotland and Australia and returned to Hong Kong in 1990s. Predominantly deploying conceptual installation as his art medium, To's works were infiltrated with literature, news, history, popular culture, movie, music, etc. intended for the exploration of the nature of shifting identities and the relationship between individuals and mass media. To was the Hong Kong representative to the 52<sup>nd</sup> "Venice Biennale."<sup>3</sup> He had given large-scale solo exhibitions in Camden Arts Centre, London and Winnipeg Art Gallery, Canada in respectively 1994 and 2002. To was the first Chinese artist to give a solo exhibition at Camden Arts Centre.<sup>4</sup> His artworks are among the collection of National Gallery of Australia, Sydney Powerhouse Museum, and Queensland Art Gallery.<sup>5</sup> Besides being a practising artist, To was also a curator. He had curated for institutions such as Institute of Modern Art Brisbane, Artspace Sydney, Ipswich Art Gallery and Next Wave Festival in Australia, and Hong Kong Goethe-Institute. He was the author of *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* and a number of articles in *South China Morning Post*, *Harper's Bazaar* (Hong Kong edition), *C for Culture*, *City Magazine*, *The Standard*, among others.

Major exhibitions of Hiram To include:

- "Twin Peaks: 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary" (Presented by and took place at Menier Gallery, London, October 31 to November 3, 2012)
- "Garlands" (Presented by and took place at Amelia Johnson Contemporary, Hong Kong, June 28 to July 28, 2012)
- "One Suitcase Per Person: David Diao, Ken Lum, Hiram To" (Presented by and took place at 1a space, Hong Kong, November 24, 2011 to January 31, 2012)
- "Canto 6" (Presented by Harper's Bazaar [Hong Kong edition], July 7 to 17, 2011, Festival Walk Hong Kong)
- "FOR YOUR PLEASURE with Scott Redford" (Presented by and took place at 2p Contemporary, Hong Kong, May 28 to August 15, 2011)
- "Garden District" (April 9 to May 5, 2009, Goethe Institut Hong Kong)
- "Don't Let me be Misunderstood" (Presented by and took place at Winnipeg Art Gallery, Canada, January 24 to May 19, 2002)
- "Damage" (Presented by and took place at 1a space, Hong Kong, July 21 to August 7, 2000)
- Curator of "Bad Rice" (Presented by and took place at 1a space, Hong Kong, December 12, 1998 to January 10, 1999)
- "High Performance" (Presented by and took place at Camden Arts Centre, London, March 18 to April 24, 1994)

Hiram To passed away in Hong Kong on March 12, 2017, at the age of 53.

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.venicebiennale.hk/vb2007/latest\\_press\\_20070611.php?L=tc](http://www.venicebiennale.hk/vb2007/latest_press_20070611.php?L=tc).

<sup>4</sup> See <https://remix.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Hiram-TO.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://remix.org.au/artist-profile-hiramto/>.

## Wan Qingli (1945-2017)

Wan Qingli was born in Beijing in 1945 and was graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in 1963 with a Master degree in Chinese painting. He was the apprentice of Li Keran and Lu Yanshao. He continued his study in the U.S. in 1984. Directed by Professor Li Chutsing, Wan earned his PhD in art history at The University of Kansas. He started teaching at The University of Hong Kong in 1989 and moved on to Hong Kong Baptist University in 2006 to be the founding dean and chair professor of the Academy of Visual Arts. Wan had lived in Weston, Florida after his retirement in 2011.

As a world-renowned art historian, Wan has written over one hundred pieces of thesis on art history and ten-plus art research publications. Xiao Fenqi, Chief Curator of Guangdong Provincial Lingdong Museum of Arts, wrote in *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* that “(Wan’s) *Not a Century of Decline: A History of Nineteenth Century Chinese Painting* fills a void in art history. It occupies a pivotal, unattainable position in the academia.”<sup>6</sup> Wan devoted his life on the research of early modern and modern Chinese painting history. He stressed the originality of Chinese ink art and that it should not be approached or evaluated solely according to western art criteria. In the 1990s, Wan and Wu Guanzhong had a heated debate during which Wan refuted Wu’s statement “brush and ink equal zero” (*Bimo dengyu ling*) with “no brush and no ink equal zero” (*Wu bi wu mo dengyu ling*).

Wan was as much a practitioner as an art historian. He had participated in exhibitions such as “Bonds of Memory: Wan Qingli’s Collection of Chinese Art given by his Teachers and Friends” (Hong Kong Museum of Art, December 13, 2013 to April 23, 2014), “Highlights of Dao revealed through brush & ink: Chinese paintings and works of calligraphy & seal engraving by Wan Qingli, Daniel Lau Chak-kwong and Koo Wai-bong” (Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University, January 17 to 29, 2009), “A Brush with Irony: Paintings by Wan Qingli” (University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong, 2006), etc. Wan was also the collector of works of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese calligraphers and painters, which amounted to over 140 items of calligraphy, painting, seal carving and hand-written letters.

“Wan was one of the few academics to master both the history and practice of art. As a member of the generation born just after the second world war and only a few years before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, Wan experienced political and social upheaval at an early age, which paved a unique path for his later academic and artistic pursuits,” says Professor Pedith Chan, BA Programme in Cultural Management, to *South China Morning Post*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Xiao Fenqi. “In Memory of Professor Wan Qingli, my respected teacher (mianhuai enshi wan qingli jiaoshou),” in *Hong Kong Commercial Daily* online version, March 3, 2017. [http://www.hkcd.com.hk/content/2017-03/03/content\\_3630570.htm](http://www.hkcd.com.hk/content/2017-03/03/content_3630570.htm).

<sup>7</sup> “Wan Qingli, Hong Kong artist and art historian, mourned by city’s art community following his death aged 72 in Florida,” *South China Morning Post*, January 24, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/culture/arts-entertainment/article/2064947/wan-qingli-hong-kong-artist-and-art-historian-mourned>.

Wan's publications include:

- *Bonds of Memory: Wan Qingli's Collection of Chinese Art given by his Teachers and Friends* (exhibition catalog) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2013).
- *Collection of Early Modern and Modern Chinese painting: Tsao Family Collection (jīnxiandai zhongguo huihua jicui: caoshimozhai cang)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2011)
- *Not a Century of Decline: A History of Nineteenth Century Chinese Painting (bing fei shuailuo de bainian: Shijiu shiji Zhongguo huihua shi)* (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Bxooks Co. Ltd., 2005).
- *Collection of Wan Qingli's Writing on the Arts (wan qingli meishu wenji)* (Beijing: People's Fine Arts Publishing House, 2004)
- Li Chutsing, Wan Qingli. *History of Chinese Modern Painting: Contemporary, 1950-2000 (zhongguo xiandai huihuashi dangdaizhibu, 1950-2000)* (Taipei: Rock Publishing Intl., 2003)
- Li Chutsing, Wan Qingli. *History of Chinese Modern Painting: Late Qing Dynasty, 1840-1911 (zhongguo xiandai huihuashi wanqingzhibu, 1840-1911)* (Taipei: Rock Publishing Intl., 2003)
- Li Chutsing, Wan Qingli. *History of Chinese Modern Painting: Republic Era (zhongguo xiandai huihuashi minguoazhibu)* (Shanghai: Wenhui chubanshe, 2003)
- *The World of Li Keran, 1907-1989 (li keran de shije 1907-1989)* (Taipei: Xizhitang wenhua chuban qsiye youxian gongsi, 2000)
- *Artists and Art History: Collected writings on modern art* (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 1997).
- *Lu Yanshao* (Taipei: Jinxiu chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1996)
- *A Critical Review of Li Keran's Art 1907-1989 (li keran pingzhuan 1907-1989)* (Taipei: Hsiung Shih Art Books Co. Ltd., 1995)

Wan Qingli passed away in Florida, U.S.A. on January 11, 2017, at the age of 72.

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**Alfonso Wong (1925-2017)**

Born in Tianjin on May 27, 1925, Wong graduated from the western art department of Fu Jen University in Beijing. He moved to Hong Kong in 1956 and worked in a French Catholic church. His job duties included creating illustrations for the content of *The Bible* and *Lefeng Bao* (literally “The Happy Pioneers’ Newspaper”), a publication of the church. When he was not working, Wong created comics and published them under various pen-names. *Old Master Q*, published under the pen-name “Wong Chak,” which is actually the name of Wong’s eldest son, has been the most popular among all of Wong’s comic works. It was so well-accepted that most Hong Kong people has taken “Wong Chak” as Wong’s name. Drawn in unembellished brushstrokes, *Old Master Q* depicted details of daily lives in fanciful, mocking and quixotic tones. More than 400 published volumes had swamped the Chinese societies for more than five decades. The printed version has been adapted into movies and animation. There have been a number of exhibitions of the printed comic in art galleries and museums in Hong Kong, including “*Old Master Q: What The @#\$% Is Going On? Original Works by Alphonso Wong*” (Sotheby’s Hong Kong, August 9 to 29, 2014), “*Indulging In Imagination — Exhibition Of Old Master Q’s Comics Works*” (Comix Home Base, December 10, 2016 to January 4, 2017), among others. *Old Master Q* comics is among the collection of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and the Monterey Park Bruggemeyer Library. In September 2017, Old Master Q was posthumously awarded the “outstanding contribution award” of the “China Animation Golden Dragon Award” at the 14<sup>th</sup> China International Comics Festival.

Alfonso Wong passed away on January 1, 2017 (U.S. time) at the age of 93.

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