

Nottingham
Contemporary



Wu Tsang

Devotional Document (Part I)

20 May – 28 August 2017

Wu Tsang

Devotional Document (Part I)

20 May – 28 August 2017

Wu Tsang's installations, performances, sculptures and videos move fluidly between documentary and fiction. Titled *Devotional Document (Part I)*, this exhibition is the artist's first solo show in the UK. It brings together two film installations and a video: *Duilian* (2016), *Damelo Todo/Odot Olemad* (2010-15), and *Shape of a Right Statement* (2008). These works give an overview of Tsang's ongoing use of performance and magical realism to interrogate history and representation. Together, they trace imagined histories and unrecognized languages.

Installed in Gallery 1, *Duilian* is inspired by the life and writings of the turn-of-the-century Chinese poet Qiu Jin, a revolutionary martyr. Tsang's narrative is set off the shores of Hong Kong on a colonial-era junk boat. It floats between the past and the present, as well as between disparate cultural identities. *Duilian* interweaves collaboratively translated poetry, performance and the remarkably

theatrical martial art of *wushu*. Installed in Gallery 2, *Damelo Todo* was filmed in Los Angeles, where Tsang lived for the past decade, in a bar called the Silver Platter. For over 50 years, the Silver Platter has been a meeting place for several generations of queer and trans communities, often immigrants and political refugees from Central America. It was where, in 2008, Tsang started to co-host a weekly club night called Wildness. *Damelo Todo* tells the story of a Salvadorian teenager who came to LA fleeing his country's civil war.

For Tsang, the relationship between the cinematic and the social is inherently problematic. She sees her filmmaking as a testing ground for collaboration and repeated, perhaps ritualistic, refusals of representation. To quote Tsang in her ongoing dialogue with the theorist and poet Fred Moten: "These devotional practices seek passage to our sociality through impossible or unavailable images."

1. *Duilian* (2016)

Duration 26 mins

Excerpts from the script, written by Wu Tsang, based on poems by Qiu Jin (秋瑾), Wu Zhiying (吳芝瑛) and Xu Xihua (徐自華), collectively "mis-translated" into Bahasa Indonesian, English, Iloco, and Tagalog by the Mutual Love Society (共愛會), Hong Kong, in 2015.

I.

Goresan besi, lengkungan perak, sajak-sajakmu tak terbatas maknanya.
Mutual affection drove us to explore the world together.
Magkatuwang na pagpapahalaga at pag-iibigan ang nagtulak sa atin
upang sabay nating harapin ang hamon ng buhay.

Bagi sahabat yang baik, pertemuan berarti kebahagiaan.
For good companions, encounter means happiness.
Bilang magkatugma, ligaya ay dulot ng ating pagsasama.
曾因同調訪天涯,知己相逢樂自偕。

II.

Baik hidup maupun mati tak dapat memutus keterikatan kita.
Neither life nor death can devalue our attachment.
Buhay man o kamatayan hindi tayo maghihiwalay

Seumpama seruling bambu, kita adalah musik dalam harmoni.
As musical is the bamboo flute, so is our harmony.
Kasing ganda ng tunog ng pluta an gating pag-uunawaan.

不結死生盟總泛,和次填篋韻應佳。

III.

Seumpama aroma bunga iris dan anggrek yang menyentuh hati,
begitulah keintiman kita ini.
As the fragrance of orchids touches the heart, so is our intimacy.
Kasing bango ng waling waling ninanamnam ang kaibuturan ng puso.

Seperti batu dan emas yang kokoh, begitu juga kekuatan hubungan kita.
As stones and gold are strong, so is our closeness.
And Ating pag-iisa ay 'sing tibay ng bato at ang pagkakalapit ay 'sing puro ng ginto.

芝蘭氣味心心印,金石襟懷默默諧。

IV.

Kata-kata tidak cukup untuk menggambarkan kedekatan kita.
Words cannot describe our friendship.
Hindi maipaliwanag ang lalim ng ating pagkakaibigan.

Saya berharap hubungan kita tidak akan pernah berubah selamanya.
I hope our relationship will never change.
Hangad ko na sana'y hindi ito magbabago.

文字之交管鮑誼,願今相愛莫相乖。

Wu Tsang, *Duilian*, 2016. Courtesy the artist, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin. Commissioned and produced by Spring Workshop, Hong Kong. With co-commissioners: Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève (for BIM 2016); ArtHub Asia; Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. With the support of Nottingham Contemporary.

2. *Damelo Todo* (2010-15)

Duration 20 mins

Excerpts from the script, written by Wu Tsang, based on a short story by Raquel Gutierrez.

Scene 1

RAQUEL (Narrator): It's 1985, MacArthur Park, Los Angeles. Teóduelo Mejía is a young manboy who arrived to Pico-Union. He is 15 years old, the second youngest of three strapping boys in his family's brood. But since he is the only one living stateside, he is quickly being groomed, considering who is father is and what his father means to the FPL [Fuerzas Populares de Liberación Farabundo Martí]. The Salvadoran-led Central American agencies in his neighbourhood have different agendas, yet operate under the auspices of much-needed asylum for the waves of political immigrants arriving each day from El Salvador. It is the third year this parade announces itself in the northern corridors of MacArthur Park.

TOPACIO: Primero dios, papito. (*God first, little daddy.*)

RAQUEL: Topacio is her name. She bends down to say this into his ear; her hair freshly crimped smells of the rosemary that grows wild in their urban cantón. The scent makes Bonnie Brae Street bearable.

TEÓDULO: De dónde vino? A dónde va? (*Where did she come from? Where does she go?*)

RAQUEL: He traps her in his mind and goes to sleep with the goose-fleshy feeling of her lips brushing against his ear. He dreams with thickest possibility.

TEÓDULO: Topacio, dámele todo. (*Topacio, gimme everything.*)

Scene 6

Rubia knows that Topacio's not ready yet but she is in a new army now. It takes a people's army years of training before they can emerge into the light, allowing others to see them, to fight them hand-to-hand. Theirs is now a constant state of combat, even when their neighbours raise red flags against blue ones.

RUBIA: Párate derecha, chula. El pasado se pega a nuestras espaldas. No lo tenemos que ver; siempre podemos sentirlo. (*Stand up straight, chula. The past is strapped to our backs. We do not have to see it; we can always feel it.*)

RUBIA: Estas son batallas distintas. (*These are different battles.*)

TOPACIO: Ay, no se que me pasa. (*Ay, I don't know what's happening to me.*)

RUBIA: Cuando yo era pequeño, jugabamos yo y mis hermanas y primo cerca de nuestro canton. Unos juegos así en donde nos colgabamos en cada cadera y espalda, una de nosotras abrazando un arbol bien fuerte. Jalando la cebolla se llamaba ese juego, pero ya sabes que me gusta jalar muchas cosas, jijiji. Pero habia otro juegito que teniamos con el hueso de la rodilla de una vaca que lo usabamos como dados-en un lado era lado de carne y el otro lado el lado de hueso. Era el hueso o la carne que decidia como nos iba a tocar en el juego. El hueso o la carne. Como me va tocar hoy-eso es lo que me pregunto cada día y noche, cuando me levanto de la cama, cuando salgo a la calle, cuando me meto al van blanco, y cuando salgo con mi sueldo. Cómo me toca hoy? Cómo me tocará mañana-carne o hueso. A comer o a chupar. Pero yo siempre se porque al fin yo, siendo madre Leona Rubia, lo decido. (*When I was a kid, me, my sisters and my cousin played close to our home. We played games in which we would hold on to our hips and backs, one of us holding tight to a tree trunk. Tugging the onion, that's what we used to call that game, but you know I like to tug at things. Hahahaha. But there was another little game we used to play with a cow knee-bone that we used as a dice. One side was flesh, the other, bone. It was that bone what decided our fate in the game. Bone or flesh. What will my fate be today? That's what I ask myself every day and every night, when I get up, when I go out, when I get into the white van, when I get out with my pay. What is it going to be today? What is it going to be tomorrow - flesh or bone? Eat or suck. But I always know, being Leona Rubia [Blonde Lioness], that I'm always the one to decide.*)

3. *Shape of a Right Statement* (2008)

Duration 5 mins

Original text by Amanda Baggs, performed by Wu Tsang

The previous part of this video was in my native language. Many people have assumed that when I talk about this being my language that means that each part of the video must have a particular symbolic message within it designed for the human mind to interpret. But my language is not about designing words or even visual symbols for people to interpret. It is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment. Reacting physically to all parts of my surroundings.

In the end I want you to know that this has not been intended as a voyeuristic freak show where you get to look at the bizarre workings of the autistic mind. It is meant as a strong statement on the existence and value of many different kinds of thinking and interaction in a world where how close you can appear to a specific one of them determines whether you are seen as a real person or an adult or an intelligent person. And in a world in which those determine whether you have any rights there are people being tortured, people dying because they are considered non-persons because their kind of thought is so unusual as to not be considered thought at all. Only when the many shapes of personhood are recognized will justice and human rights be possible.

Shape of a Right Statement will be on display in our new project space - former small collections room - an interdisciplinary area that explores new modes of display.

