

The Work of Hong Kong Artists Ha Bik Chuen

Michelle Wun Ting Wong

(PhD Candidate in Art History, The University of Hong Kong)

My project is on the oeuvre of Hong Kong artist Ha Bik Chuen (夏碧泉 1925-2009), which includes his prints and print matrices, which he called motherboards, his sculptures, and a posthumously discovered collage practice. A self-taught artist, Ha's creative output does not conform to the conventional linear narrative of an artist's early, mid, and later works. While Ha's motherboards date from 1970s to 1990s, his sculptures were made throughout 1960s-2000s and his collage practice lasted from 1958-2009. Throughout 1960s-2000s, Ha amassed a large collection of printed matter and photographic documentation of exhibitions were a repository of sources for his creative work. Ha stored these sources in a dedicated space across from where he lived and called it his "thinking studio." Currently I am looking into Ha's motherboards as core to his artistic practice. I propose that materiality is an entry point for us to understand Ha's motherboards, and thus a way to think about his other artworks as well. By examining how Ha's art and collecting practices are enmeshed, I suggest the "thinking studio" was deliberately cultivated as a space where Ha could be an artist and think about larger ideas around art, modernism, and visual culture through his works.

I plan to include Ha's collecting practice as part of his biography because it was a key part of his artist persona. However, an artist's persona and his/her biography could be constructed and manipulated, while a detailed biography does not necessarily ensure a critical study of an artist's works. I am therefore interested in how one writes a biographical account in art history. Ha also collected photographic self-portraits that he took with his works, other artists and members of the art world at different occasions. These self-portraits form another kind of visual and fluid biography, in which Ha inserted himself into the art world occupying multiple roles, some more staged than the others—as artist, as friend of artist, as viewer of art. The images Ha collected and organised not only tell of the ways he consumed and internalised the world around him, they also became portals through which he constructed a cosmopolitan imaginary while being located in Hong Kong. In my project, I suggest that these sources not only help us better understand Ha as an artist, but also tell a story of an expanded visual cultural world that converged upon Hong Kong.

Some of the questions I bring with me to the Moving Biography Summer School are as follows: What are the places of artworks and exhibition histories in an artist's biography? Where and how does Ha's "thinking studio" and its content fit in his biography and a larger story of Hong Kong's art history?

Short Biography: Michelle Wun Ting Wong is a PhD candidate in art history at the University of Hong Kong. From 2012–20 she was a researcher at Asia Art Archive (AAA), focusing on Hong Kong art history and histories of exchange and circulation through exhibitions and periodicals. She curated *Portals, Stories, and Other Journeys* at Tai Kwun Contemporary (2021), and was part of the curatorial teams for 11th Edition of Gwangju Biennale (2016), and Yokohama Triennale 2020. Her writing has been published in *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art, 1945–1990* (2018), the journal *Southeast of Now* (2019) amongst others.