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## Stuck in time and place: emerging artists Alan Kwan and Kenny Wong at Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong

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### Two young Hong Kong artists explore the feeling of being still, yet going forward.

As Hong seems stuck between a dramatically glorious past and an uncertain future, the two young Hong Kong artists Alan Kwan and Kenny Wong's joint exhibition, titled "The Interstitial" at Hong Kong's Pearl Lam Galleries, uses computational art to narrate a feeling of "stuckness".



Kenny Wong, 'dist.solo', 2016, metal, stepper motor, microcomputer, custom software, LCD panel, microcontrollers, custom electronics, 370 x 160 x 50 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

Artists Alan Kwan and Kenny Wong claim that their exhibition **"The Interstitial"**, running from 22 July to 15 September 2016 at **Pearl Lam Galleries** Hong Kong, is not an immediate response to any social issues, but it reflects a feeling of what they refer to as "stuckness" that permeates Hong Kong and its people.

**"The Interstitial"** (PDF download) showcases Alan Kwan and Kenny Wong's works from various stages of their careers and uses computational technologies to compose motion, memories and ideas from the imagination in dynamic and fluid forms. Their works include a series of installations, prints and video games, on display to explore the mental state of "stuckness" as well as the space in their minds, presenting unsettled feelings and recollections that allow for further exploration.



Alan Kwan, 'The List', 2008, Digital Video, 1m:02s. Image courtesy the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

### Alan Kwan: video in art and art in video games

Born in 1990 in Hong Kong, Alan Kwan gained his BA in Creative Media at City University of Hong Kong in 2012, followed by an MSc in Art, Culture and Technology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, MA, USA in 2016. One of his media art presentations *Words after* (2016) was drawn on his own speech impediment. The footage of

the artist stuttering is pieced together with previous documentary work that involves him attaching a video camera to his glasses. The artist edited the footage, causing it to visually stutter, while also amplifying and exaggerating his own speech in order to express the anger and anxiety caused by difficulties in verbal communication.



Alan Kwan, 'The Hallway—Virtual Photograph Series', 2016, inkjet print on paper, 100 x 67 cm.  
Image courtesy the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

Another work by Kwan entitled *The Hallway* (2016) presents a single-player video game inspired by Kwan's childhood experiences, in which the player takes on the perspective of a five-year-old child who has been kicked out into the hallway outside his home by his father. His encounter of spaces manifests his childhood experiences, which connect with insecurity. The player is forced to confront spatial paradoxes that allow him to share the anxiety felt by the child. Kwan tells *Art Radar* about his works:

*I think my works in this exhibition are all about "stuckness" – a state of mind in which you feel like you are constantly progressing but you are in fact always stuck in the same place.*



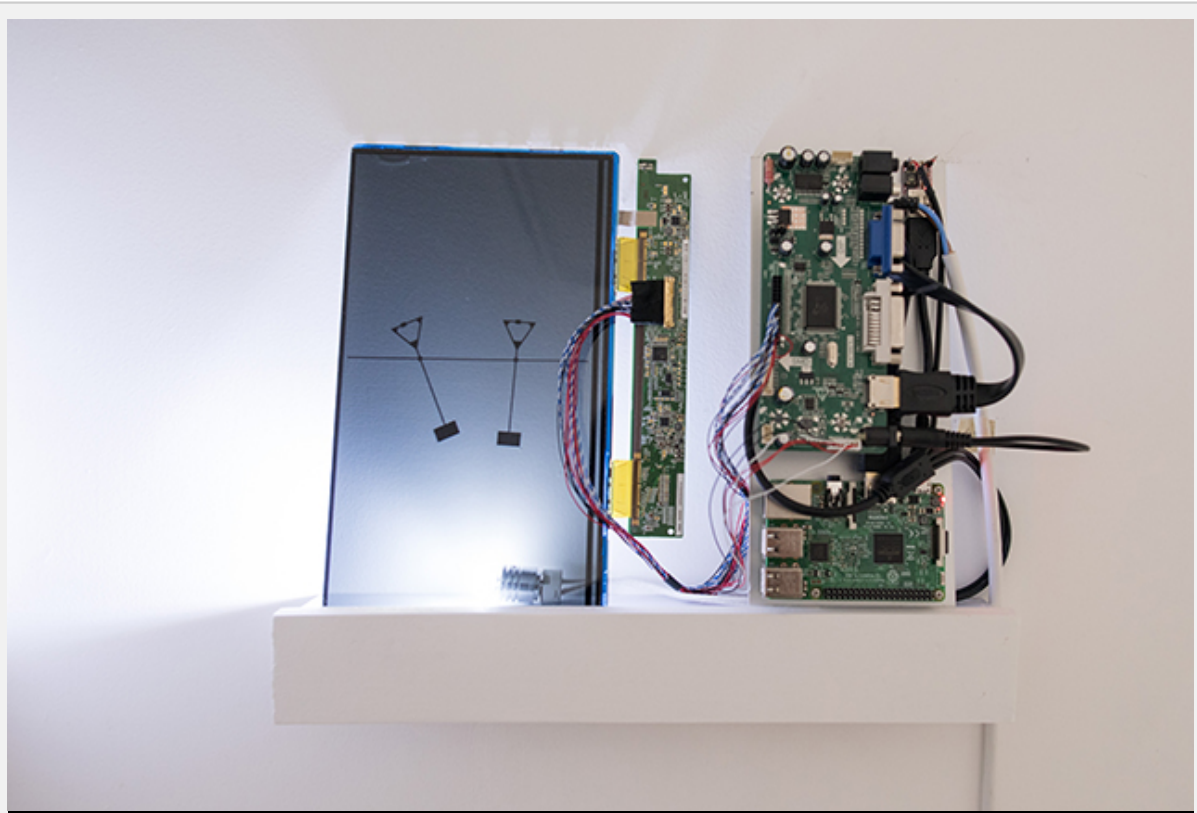
Alan Kwan, 'The Words After', 2016, digital video, 2m:35s. Image courtesy the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

According to Kwan, the recent political conflict and change in Hong Kong with the Umbrella Revolution in 2014, subconsciously influenced his creation of work, emphasizing this feeling of a city that is stuck, as he relays to *Art Radar*:

*[...] I think that happened subconsciously. Right after the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong I created the video work "The Words After". My intention was to express my emotions towards my own stuttering and the state of being stuck, but now when I watch the video again I think maybe it's more than that.*

His sensitivity to the reality of suffering has driven him to express his feelings of pain through his art, like other artists that have influenced him:

*I would say I'm heavily influenced by writer Chuck Palahniuk and screenwriter Charlie Kaufman. I read/watched a lot of their works when I was a teenager and learnt about how to survive in this dark and painful world, and also how to joke about it. I guess that's why I always love to play with my stuttering, and my ridiculous childhood memories in my works.*



Kenny Wong, 'dist.duo', 2016, aluminium, microcomputer, custom software, disassembled LCD Panel, custom electronics, LED light bulb, 24 x 34 x 10 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

### Kenny Wong: the analogue-digital hybrid

The other Hong Kong artist in the exhibition, Kenny Wong, was born in 1987, and he is currently pursuing his MFA in Sculpture at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. His works explore the delicate relationship between daily experiences and perceptual stimulations by hybridising analogue and digital creations.

Wong tells *Art Radar* about his two new projects in the exhibition, beginning with the "Dist" series:

*"Dist" begins with topics about personal feelings towards relationships. My drastic changes in personal relationships stimulate myself to express these matters. As I always think along with motions, these works are representing my imagined motions with kinetic movements and the generative power by the use of computer, representing the variation, indefiniteness, randomness of relationships, as well as [its] unpredictable [nature] and rhythms.*



Kenny Wong, 'Last Walk on Thirteen Streets', 2016, staircase, microcomputer, custom software, LCD panels, solenoid, microcontroller, custom electronics, steel, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the

artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

*Last Walk on Thirteen Streets* (2016) began when Wong was still in Canada, as he tells *Art Radar*:

*"Last Walk on Thirteen Streets" began from the time when I was in Canada last year. The living style and cultural differences inspired me to reflect on my own values, identities, and collective memories of Hong Kong people. I had planned to move away from Hong Kong, but I couldn't find the sense of belonging in my new place. So it was a struggle, a frustration, a continuous loop of finding oneself. The feelings and emotions were transformed into mechanical movement and the video content. Kinetically there are random inclinations of the LCD screens, while the video content tries to virtually compensate the drop. The video is showing a man endlessly walking downstairs, but never able to reach the bottom but endlessly walking. The work explores the switch and the interrelationship between the real and virtual space, dream and reality.*



Kenny Wong, 'dist.visualcapture', 2016, Inkjet print on light box, 57 x 32 x 5.5 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

Wong explores the delicate relationship between daily experiences and perceptual stimulations, merging kinetic and digital representation to create computational kinetic installations, as he calls them:

*I would like to call my current works as computational kinetic installations. Combining kinetic elements and computational power enable me to design a self-running system that is defined by programming rules, to perform and generate possibilities. While we are getting used to our smartphone and other technologies everyday, it also changes how we perceive our surroundings. It is quite logical for us to understand sensors, screens, and interactions and the logics behind these gadgets, hence I am also interested to explore the possibilities of these current ways of perceiving.*



Kenny Wong, 'dist.intervene', 2016, steel, microcomputer, custom software, disassembled LCD Panel, microcontroller, custom electronics, 285 x 150 x 45 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

With regard to the recent changes in Hong Kong and their relation to his artworks, Wong comments on the present situation in Hong Kong:



*It definitely has affect my daily lives and my thinking. The feelings of powerlessness and struggle have been appearing in my recent work, while they are still quite subtle. I am aware of the changes, hoping to respond in various ways, finding the common voice. I don't have a specific work to respond to these issues, but since the affect is so big, I believe these struggles will continue to appear in my future works.*

*Hong Kong is a fast paced city that still has a lot of traditional industries and makers, allowing the varieties and possibilities of materials, mixture of new and old. The mobility and the logistic systems allow me to obtain different materials in a short period of time from different locations, and at the same time, it is possible to find local makers to work together on projects. I use media art as the material to convey a partial story of Hong Kong – the possibilities and varieties of the city, by the use of technology and different materials. However the traditional industries are diminishing, I hope the art and the creative side of the cities can help to preserve its heritage and the uniqueness of the place.*



Kenny Wong, 'Human Body', 2009, digital video, 2m:40s. Image courtesy the artist and Pearl Lam Galleries.

### **Embracing Hong Kong's new artistic talent**

Gallery owner Pearl Lam is eager to promote Hong Kong artists in the international art scene and appreciates local emerging talent. Lam tells *Art Radar*:

*Both of these artists are extremely young but have gained notable followings and been the recipients of prestigious awards here in Hong Kong. The gallery has always been interested in promoting home grown talent, and in exploring new mediums, and it's good to see a rapidly growing appreciation for these young Hong Kong artists who are embracing computational technology and other new mediums. We hope that this is only set to continue with the growing renown for Hong Kong artist Samson Young who has been chosen to represent Hong Kong at the Venice Biennale in 2017.*

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