



PLASTIC FANTASTIC

Local artist **ANGELA YUEN** may not limit the medium she uses, but her latest show is all about shining a light on elements that no longer cast shadows in Hong Kong, writes **ANDREW DEMBINA**



When approaching a new wall-mounted relief piece or freestanding work by Hong Kong artist Angela Yuen, it's hard to know what to look at first. The works' common features are a blaze of carefully positioned colourful plastic objects, and sequences of coloured lights that appear and disappear to cast shadows across the creations themselves and the white walls that surround them.

These are sophisticated works that Yuen, aged just 28, has been honing for the past three years. "My art can be quite different," she explains. "This plastic-toys series is one of the largest parts of my work, but some of what I do is very conceptual – my whole artistic practice uses 'found objects'."

"In the past I've used patterned and printed fabric, the type that was common in the 1970s, '80s and '90s as 'door curtains' for families in public housing estates and crowded flats. I made an installation from this fabric to symbolise a 'trust level' for visitors viewing my work. The idea came from when I was growing up and families kept their doors open, with just the curtain there for privacy. When kids finished their homework, they could just go to neighbours' homes and see if other children were free to play together."

When the viewer takes time to look at a piece as a whole, it quickly becomes obvious that the shadows those permanently and temporarily projected – are as much a

ABOVE: CHRONO CROSS (2018)

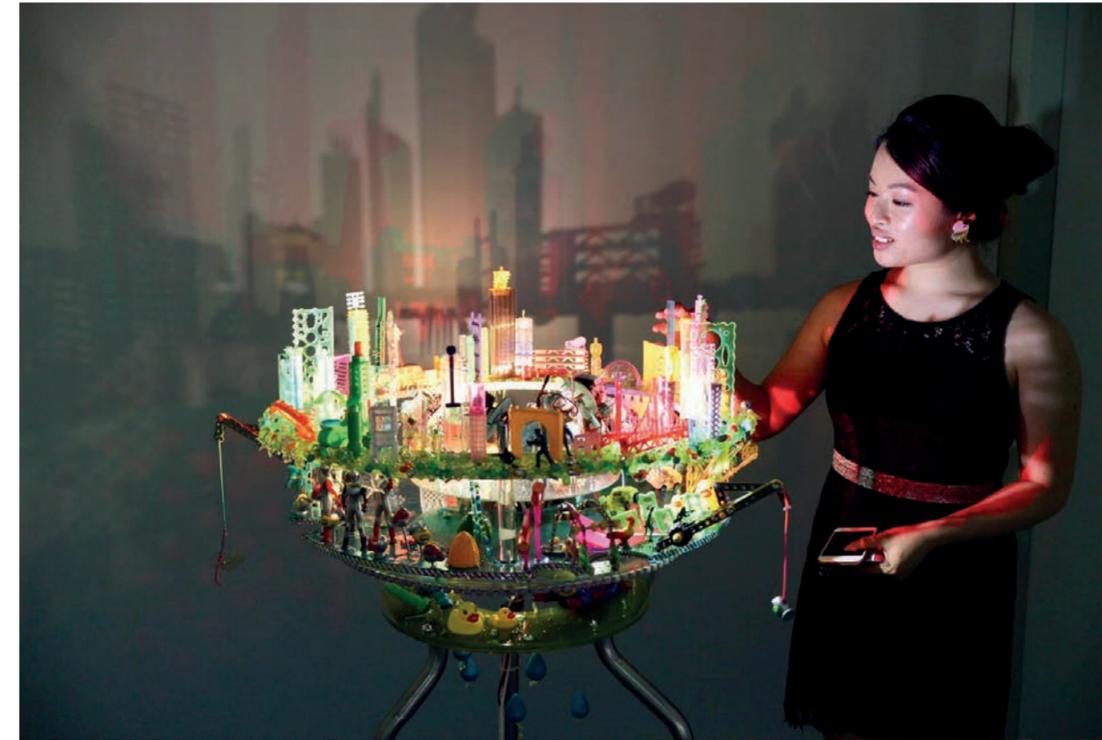
“MY CONCEPT IS OF A TIME-TRAVEL MACHINE THAT’S HAD SOME KIND OF MALFUNCTION AND ENTERS A PARALLEL UNIVERSE”

Since graduating with a degree in visual arts from the Hong Kong Baptist University in 2014, Yuen has been a prolific exhibitor, with many of her pieces snapped up by collectors. She constantly displays in group shows, including seven last year in Hong Kong and mainland China, and seven other exhibitions in 2018, including one in Melbourne, Australia alongside nine other Hong Kong mixed-media artists.

As an undergraduate, Yuen considered an art-gallery career and undertook an internship in a commercial gallery. However, during that time the owner shut down his operations and she met veteran local curator Eric Leung, who’s been active in mentoring emerging coming Hong Kong artists. “Eric gave me so much great advice on moving forward and not being afraid of failure – saying that there was always something to learn from it – that I opened my own studio after graduating and really put all my energy into creating work and exhibiting,” she recalls. “He also put me in touch with [gallery owner] Angela Li last year – and now I have this show.”

The exhibition starting month and featuring 13 works at Angela Li Contemporary is Yuen’s most important solo show to date. Entitled *The Lost Time Travel Machine*, Yuen depicts long-departed visual aspects of Hong Kong such as rickshaws, the old Queen’s Pier in Central and motorcycle and sidecar ice-cream vendors. But don’t mistake this

part of the whole form as the physical elements. The ingenious appeal of these illuminated plastic composite artworks is that they create a series of artful Hong Kong-inspired cityscapes from unlikely raw materials: gaudy mass-produced toys, hairclips and beads to name a few. Some works feature hidden, blinking multi-coloured lightbulbs, while in some kinetic pieces, motors help shift the cityscapes in form and sometimes colour.

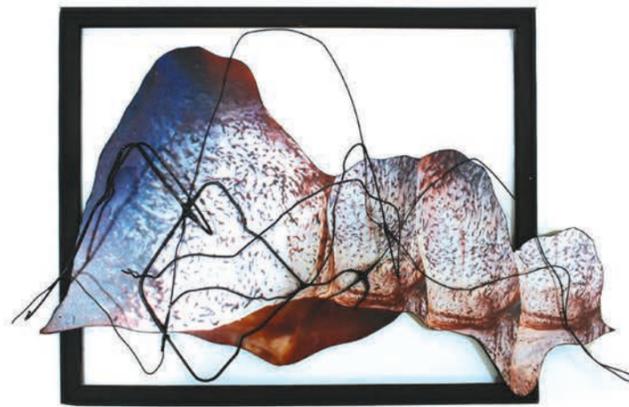


CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: YUEN WITH CITY RHAPSODY (2019); ROOM 336 (2019); SUNDRIED MEET LANDSCAPE (2016)



collection as a nostalgic reflection, she advises. “It’s not going back to those times,” she explains. “My concept is of a time-travel machine that’s had some kind of malfunction and enters a parallel universe where those things that are gone are still there among today’s skyline.”

Yuen’s selected elements are often objects that vanished from Hong Kong before her own recollections began. “I used to watch old films and dramas with my father,” she



says, “and I’d see rickshaws being pulled by drivers who were walking or running in the road right next to cars, or people crowding around the motorbike ice-cream sellers, and I thought what a shame it is that these things don’t exist today. It’s a bit like the old street hawkers, too – there’s a generation gap. So I did some research, and watched a lot of documentaries on old Hong Kong.”

Earlier works in the plastic toy series have been bought by collectors and even appeared in public spaces, including the now-defunct Isola Bar & Grill in IFC Mall. Yuen entered one of the series – *Chrono Cross* – for the open annual Sovereign Asian Art Prize in Hong Kong last year. She was also included in last year’s buzzing Art Central event. 

The *Lost Time Travel Machine* runs from February 13-March 31, 2020, at Angeli Li Contemporary, 248 Hollywood Road, Sheung Wan. cbl.com.hk