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# Complexities surrounding immigration, cultural identity and racism unpacked in large-scale, floral-patterned text works: *Onsite / Offsite Tsang Kin-Wah*

On View: May 5 to October 15, 2017



Image Credit: Tsang Kin-Wah, *EITHER / OR*, 2017 (detail), digital rendering for site-specific installation at the Vancouver Art Gallery, Courtesy of the artist

**April 20, 2017, Vancouver, BC** – Spread over two locations, Vancouver Art Gallery’s new public artwork by Hong Kong artist Tsang Kin-Wah opens at the Gallery’s Offsite location in the heart of downtown Vancouver, as well as installed Onsite, on the Howe Street façade of the Gallery on May 5 until October 15, 2017.

This large-scale composition transforms English texts to form intricate floral and animal patterns. The work draws from discriminatory language that appeared in newspapers and political campaigns in Vancouver during the 1887 anti-Chinese riots, the mid-1980s immigration influx from Hong Kong and most recently, the heated exchanges around the foreign buyers and the local housing market.

Onsite, on Howe Street, Tsang covers the building with text spiraling up the façade like vines, composed of Vancouver newspaper editorial columns from the 1980s. At Offsite, Tsang continues to use adverse rhetoric but contrasts it with voices of inclusion to compose floral patterns that unravel to form the body of a dragon. Together, Tsang's texts confront the persistence of language of intolerance and its voice of opposition within cities of multicultural diversity.

Tsang Kin-Wah has gained international recognition for his wall paintings and multimedia installations that involve the visual manipulation of language into patterns to form new meanings. He is best known for creating meticulously crafted artworks that blend profane or controversial texts with aesthetically pleasing William Morris-inspired floral patterns to explore the complex and contradictory relationship between appearance and content.

*Onsite / Offsite: Tsang Kin-Wah*, presented as part of the Vancouver Art Gallery's Institute of Asian Art, is curated by Diana Freundl, Associate Curator, Asian Art. This project will be accompanied by a brochure and is Tsang Kin-Wah's first exhibition in Canada.

### **About the artist**

Tsang Kin-Wah (曾建華) was born in 1976 in Shantou, Guangdong Province in China, and settled in Hong Kong in 1984. His interest in creating floral-patterned paintings and wallpaper designs began during his student years. While he was pursuing a BA Honours in Fine Arts at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, he became fascinated with the book form and relationships between text, image and narration. In 2003, he travelled to the United Kingdom to pursue a year-long Masters in Book Arts at Camberwell College of Arts in London. This move had a profound impact on Tsang, as it was in London that he realized the importance of conceptual development in the artistic process. He made his first wallpaper several months into his program, and his experiment of covering a floor with pages from the Bible sparked his interest in space and the relationship between a work and its audience.

After his studies, Tsang fell into a depression that deepened when he became a victim of racism. These experiences would lead him to craft an artistic approach that highlighted the ugliness of the world underneath a visually attractive surface. Tsang had been known in the art world since his debut in the 2001 Hong Kong Biennale, but it was not until his 2005 solo exhibition *White Cube* at the John Batten Gallery in Hong Kong that he attracted widespread acclaim. In 2012, Tsang was selected by Chinese gallery-world pioneer Pearl Lam as the first artist to exhibit in her new Hong Kong space, and in 2015, he was commissioned by the Hong Kong government to represent the city at the Venice Biennale. The artist currently lives and works in Hong Kong.

Tsang is the recipient of numerous awards, including a Bronze Prize at the 2004 Hong Kong International Poster Triennial, the 2005 Sovereign Asian Art Prize in Hong Kong and the 2007 Tokyo Type Directors Club Annual Award in Tokyo, Japan.

### **About Offsite**

Offsite is the Vancouver Art Gallery's outdoor public art space located at 1100 West Georgia Street between Thurlow and Bute Streets, west of the Shangri-La Hotel, in downtown Vancouver. Presenting an innovative program of temporary projects, it is a site for local and international contemporary artists to exhibit works related to the surrounding urban context. Featured artists consider the site-specific potential of art within the public realm and respond to the changing social and cultural conditions of our contemporary world. New projects are installed in the spring and fall of each year. *Offsite: Tsang Kin-Wah* is the fifteenth installation in the Gallery's Offsite series, curated by Diana Freundl, Associate Curator, Asian Art.

Offsite is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and funded by the City of Vancouver through the Public Art Program. The Gallery recognizes Ian Gillespie, President, Westbank; Ben Yeung, President, Peterson Investment Group; and Residents of the Shangri-La for their support of this space.

### **About The Institute of Asian Art**

Responding to the city's geographic location on the eastern edge of the Pacific Rim, the Vancouver Art Gallery has been committed to presenting contemporary art of the Asia Pacific region for more than two decades. Launched in 2014, the Gallery's Institute of Asian Art (IAA) is a comprehensive initiative committed to advancing scholarship and public appreciation of Asian art.

Founding Corporate Visionary Partner for the Institute of Asian Art:



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*Onsite: Tsang Kin-Wah* is generously supported by the City of Vancouver's Public Art Program.



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