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Reshaping 'brain' and 'eye' for creativity

By Cathy Choi
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Traditionally, exhibitions can be a one-way experience for viewers. They simply “look” at the item on show. In the new digital era, Mr Howard Cheng Chi-lai, a graduate from the School of Creative Media (SCM), and currently the creative director at a local design company, uses a more interactive approach to create a multi-sensory experience for visitors.

If you visited CityU’s “Giuseppe Castiglione – Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition” last year, you would have sampled some of Howard’s work.



Reflections of the Peacock
透視孔雀開屏圖

For example, “Reflections of the Peacock” takes Castiglione’s painting of two peacocks and separates its iconographic elements into layers that are then individually printed onto a succession of large glass panes. This spatial and optical re-formulation of the painting illuminates the unique fusion of Western single-point perspective and Chinese painterly aesthetics that Castiglione achieved in his work.

Another interactive installation includes Castiglione’s portrait of four horses in two movable frames, where these portraits are almost life-size renderings.

“These interactive installations were designed to bring art to life in an exhibition and hence to spice up the communication by encouraging more interaction with viewers,” said Howard, who singled out Professor Jeffrey Shaw, Chair Professor of Media Art at SCM, for inspiring him.

Hairstyles and noodles

Howard nearly didn’t join CityU as he was offered a place by the University of London after he completed his secondary school education in the UK. Instead of taking up the offer, he decided to apply for CityU because he had heard about the programmes on offer at SCM.

“My schoolmates teased me because I had chosen to be a ‘Cityer’ rather than a ‘Londoner’, but I was never in any doubt that I made the right decision.”



THE DOORS



DISTANCES

Mr Howard Cheng Chi-lai
鄭智禮先生

His decision to opt for SCM was vindicated during the written test set for candidates hoping to enroll at CityU.

“During the CityU written entrance test, we were asked to describe what we saw and heard around us. It was quite funny when other candidates started to look around for something to write about. I was very hungry at that time so I described how the long hair of a female student sitting in front of me looked like a bowl of noodles,” he said.

The question convinced Howard that SCM would help him reach his full potential.

Critical mind, ways of seeing and skill

To Howard, a mind with rich creativity, a vision with wide horizons and hands with proficient skill are indispensable for the creative media and art industries. Yet it takes a tremendous amount of time and tenacity to nurture a creative mind and vision. “My years of experience owning a design firm, and supervising junior designers, have made me aware of the challenges associated with training. SCM’s core training emphasises the elements of mind and vision which have effectively facilitated students’ career development. I learned that by acquiring fundamental knowledge and through frequent exposure to a wide range of disciplines, they could equip themselves with great skill.”

Howard recalled that his first lesson at SCM was to spend three hours watching a film - a simple zoom-in shot, which normally lasts for few seconds. “I didn’t feel bored at all, but rather, I reflected deeply on each shot, and I gained a lot from this lesson.”

He also learned a lot of skills in the School which at first seemed tedious but now seem indispensable. “For instance, we needed to learn how to

roll up electrical cables to avoid breakage. It seemed to be a very minor matter, but you got to think about how serious the consequence could be if the cables snapped during an exhibition!”

International exposure

Howard is passionate about exhibition design. He has coordinated the “Giuseppe Castiglione – Lang Shining New Media Art Exhibition” and the “Rebuilding the Tong-an Ships New Media Art Exhibition”, which was co-organised by CityU and the National Palace Museum in Taipei.

Howard has exhibited in various festivals and museums internationally, including Cafa Art Museum in Beijing, Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei, Tate Modern Art Gallery in London, Arad Art Museum in Romania, the “New Vision Arts Festival” at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre, and the “Move on Asia Exhibition” at the Barcelona Casa Asia.

Without the guidance of the faculty, the industry network that SCM has established and the opportunities to take part in exhibitions during his studies, none of his career highlights would have been possible, he said. ◆

HOWARD CHENG IS A HONG KONG MIXED-MEDIA ART WORKER, WHO LOVES TO EXPLORE SPECULATIVE AFFAIRS AND EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT ARTISTIC MEDIUMS, FOCUSING ON MOVING IMAGES AND MIXED MEDIA INSTALLATION.

Rebuilding the Tong-an Ships
New Media Art Exhibition
同安·潮—新媒體藝術展



創意設計 「腦」、「眼」大改造

髮型與麵條

Howard在英國中學畢業後，本已獲倫敦大學取錄；但他沒有入學，反而受城大創意媒體學院的課程吸引而慕名報讀，決意回港走自己的路。「那時同學也笑我有『倫敦人』不做，要回流當『城市人』，不過我從未懷疑過自己的決定。」

在城大進行入學筆試時，他就肯定自己沒選錯。「筆試有一道寫作題目，要我們觀察四周並將所見所聞寫下來。當時全場考生抬頭四處張望，場面十分惹笑。我的答案是：我很肚餓，看見前面女同學長長的秀髮，便想像成一碗麵。」他那時認為，學院筆試的題目也如此有創意，入讀後必定可以盡展所長。

腦、眼、手

Howard認為，從事創意媒體或藝術行業，腦（創意思維）、眼（廣闊視野）、手（靈巧手藝）三者缺一不可，培養創意思維和眼界需要大量時間和毅力。「開設了自己的設計公司後，發現要培訓其他設計師的思維其實很困難。創意媒體學院着重培養『腦和眼』的課程對學生日後的發展大有幫助。獲得知識基礎，並涉獵廣泛，『手』就不成問題了。」

Howard憶述，入讀創意媒體學院的第一課是用三小時看一齣電影：一個通常只需幾秒完成的鏡頭推進動作，足用了三小時「慢慢」完成。「我不覺得悶，反而在這三小時裏不斷細味和思考每個畫面，有很大的領會。」

他回想昔日在學院時，要學習不少看來微不足道的事，至踏足社會後才發現十分重要。「例如我們要學會把電線捲好，因為隨意捲的話容易破損。試想像一個展覽中電線突然斷了，後果有多嚴重！」

國際視野

目前主力從事展覽設計的Howard，過去曾協助策劃城大與臺北的國立故宮博物院合辦的「藝域漫遊——郎世寧新媒體藝術展」及「同安·潮——新媒體藝術展——同安船與張保仔的故事」。

其作品亦曾於多個國際藝術節及博物館展出，包括北京中央美術學院美術館、臺北當代藝術館、倫敦泰特現代美術館、羅馬尼亞阿拉德美術館、香港文化中心的新視野藝術節，以及巴塞羅那亞洲之家Move On Asia展覽等。

Howard表示，良師的啟迪、學院與業界的緊密聯繫以及在學時的參展機會，是他事業發展不可或缺的元素。◆

在參觀博物館及美術館的時候，觀眾往往是單向式的欣賞展品。創意媒體學院畢業生鄭智禮先生（Howard）成立設計公司並擔任創作及藝術總監，在業界悄悄發起革命，以創新模式將被動轉化為互動，將作品與觀眾聯繫起來。

若曾於去年參觀過城大舉辦的「藝域漫遊——郎世寧新媒體藝術展」，一定不會錯過Howard的創意成果。例如，《透視孔雀開屏圖》裝置將郎世寧畫作裏兩隻孔雀的圖像元素分層，再逐一印製在一連串玻璃面板上，利用空間和光學重新展現畫作的精妙之處，並將西方立體透視法與中國國畫元素融為一體。另外，裝嵌在可轉動框架上的四幅仿真馬尺寸的駿馬圖，相信亦令觀眾印象深刻。

Howard表示：「這些藝術裝置為畫作注入生命，可增加觀賞者與作品之間的互動。」能有今日的成就，他特別感謝創意媒體學院邵志飛媒體藝術講座教授的啟迪。