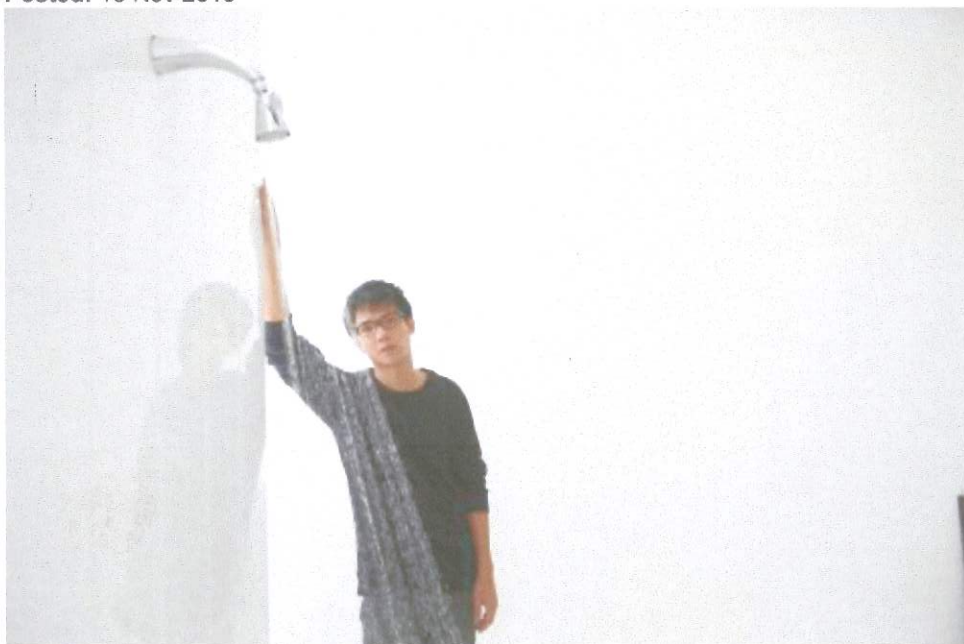


Nadim Abbas

Posted: 10 Nov 2010



Ahead of his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong, the conceptual artist lets **Mary Agnew** into his complicated thinking process.

Hong Kong born and based artist Nadim Abbas' work is heavily steeped in, and preoccupied with, notions of philosophy, psychology and literature. For a young, energetic man the weight of a mind addled with deep thought is visible from his slight stature. An academically driven student, Abbas received a BA in Fine Art (Sculpture) from Chelsea College of Art, London, and subsequently went on to gain an MPhil in Comparative Literature at the University of Hong Kong. His early London-based works saw a large concentration on theories of optical deceptions and the separation of viewer and work. He has shown extensively in Hong Kong in various group shows in galleries such as Para/Site Art Space, 1a Space, and also contributed to the *Louis Vuitton: A Passion for Creation* exhibition at the Hong Kong Museum of Art last year. He now enters a more mature phase with his first solo exhibition, titled *Cataract*, which is driven by recurrent themes of sight, water falling and an imagination that refuses to quit.

How has the experience of having your first solo show been?

It is definitely liberating. When you do a group show you always have to think about everyone else who is around you. If you make a work you can't pretend that the piece next to it is not going to affect how people are going to see it. It has allowed me to really focus on a particular idea and make that work.

How will the exhibition be structured?

So basically it is a two-part show split between Gallery EXIT and Experimenta. At Gallery EXIT there will be two kinetic light boxes depicting Victoria Falls framed in metal window grates. In Experimenta I am constructing a shower. It is literally a room with a shower in it. I have constructed a fake floor and into it I have created a little tub. So basically it's like a fountain.

Would you say your working process is atypical?

Sometimes my process gets too convoluted because I read too much. A lot of artists work more physically in an ad hoc way. They build as they go. I think a huge amount before I start to make anything. A lot of the time in my work I am creating the image of a person that is sitting and can't move, because [he is] thinking too much.

Do you feel that your work has moved on from your earlier motifs?

I think so. I went through a kind of break between my earlier work and my later work. It coincides with the period when I lived in England and the period I moved back to Hong Kong. I guess you could say I went through a slight kind of crisis. I felt I had reached a dead end with the optical things I was doing [in London] and I couldn't take it any further. I always felt that it was too detached and cool. The very definition of what I was doing was creating a space between the viewer and what they were seeing – creating a sense of distancing. Now I want to bring something else into the work in terms of subject matter, theme, concept, or whatever.

Do you feel you have achieved that with your new work?

I'm not sure. I have started to insert all sorts of things into my work that were relating to psychological or physical reactions that were still linked to seeing. But now they are concerned with having an emotional reaction or a feeling of disgust. So I still want to bring the visual back but in this more psychological way.

How does that show through in this work?

For this my first point is creating this situational space where I am setting up a generic window space in Hong Kong or maybe anywhere in the world and the viewer is looking out and seeing a waterfall. I wanted to pick an almost holiday snap image and composition to give this sense of something that even though you can physically see it, you never really see it. I really like the idea that everyone sees the same thing. It is kind of ironic because the idea of seeing a waterfall is supposed to be unique and there is this romance attached; but in the end the memories that people take back with them are the same. And they follow a certain social code.

Where does the notion of 'cataract' come from?

The idea of cataract is linked to the idea of a waterfall. Of trying to see something or in the sense that when you see something there is something you cannot see. Something that is absent but present. On one hand you have the illusion of a romantic waterfall light box – of course no one fools themselves to think that what they are seeing is a real waterfall, but at the same time there is a kind of instant gratification. It's hypnotic. Then in the other room you have this live thing but at the same time it is a total failure because, of course, it's not a waterfall; it's a shower and yet it has a real presence.

Nadim Abbas: *Cataract is concurrently at Gallery EXIT and Experimenta until December 11.*