

Upon first glance, Anton Poon's studio located in a Tsuen Wan industrial building, seems to be an experimental metal workshop. Wrenches, nails, and metal scraps in an assortment of shapes and sizes inhabit open surfaces. Curious machinery monopolizes the space, bearing implications of transpired cutting, welding, and soldering, actions - reflecting what is presumably a labour intensive sculptural practice.

Known for his large scale, often heavy duty constructs fit with an industrial edge, Hong Kong born Poon grew up and studied in Australia, where he developed his abstract, formal sculptural style. With a self-described hands-on and laborious practice, the artist recalls his conventional arts education:

"I was taught with very traditional bauhaus principles, where the object is reinforced with concept. I'm making sculptures, not conceptual art, but at the same time there has to be a compromise. The sculpture has to speak to something larger than its beauty."

Inspired by Poon's persisting negotiation between Australian and Hong Kong culture, his sculptures resonate thematically beyond their aesthetic value, transgressing the very boundaries he seeks to navigate.

Since moving back to Hong Kong two and half years ago, Poon experienced transitional challenges, making him question his identity and sense of belonging. This geographical transition is mirrored through his artistic lens, reflected in a new series of work for this exhibition, *Fabricating Space Exploring Identities Through Sculpture*. In his own words, this show is "about making sense of Hong Kong."

Visually manifesting this transition, Poon ventures out of his comfort zone and experiments with acrylic sheets for the first time to create low relief 2D works entitled *Reinvestigating Series*. Marking a drastic shift from his earlier works, these vibrant and colorful works are composed of multiple cut out segments, based on google map images of Hong Kong, indicative of the artist's desire to refamiliarize himself with an ever changing city. This newfound play with color stems from Poon's desire to draw from the city, each color used is reflective of those typically found on buildings in Hong Kong, as well as his recent tryst with oil painting.

A semicircular form inserted in every work belonging to this series denotes challenges the artist encounters with his move back to the city. Finding his mannerisms too straight forward for Hong Kong, his family chastised him to find a more "round" or less direct way to communicate. Meeting them halfway, he encapsulates this compromise in the form of a semicircle, half straight, half round. The composition of the works is similar to a jigsaw puzzle, the formation of which serves as a metaphor for Poon's perspective on the city, as well as his identity - one with multiple pieces adhering to a specific construct.

Conceptually evocative of construction and physically reminiscent of architectural models, the works, and much of Poon's practice are subconsciously informed by his initial short

term studies in architecture. This further extends into his creative process and space. Amid the tools and apparatus found in his studio, foam maquettes for his three dimensional sculptures, immediately catch the eye. Poon again calls upon constructive metaphors, likening the process of creating these maquettes with building lego: "It's like lego pieces, I arrange them in a playful, intuitive way in which the pieces relate to each other formally and conceptually."

Formed with corten steel, triangular modular pieces connected with one another assume these sculptures forms, belying an origami like lightness. This deceptive contrast attributes itself to Poon's education in sculpture, and his influences, in particular the renowned Australian American sculptor, Clement Meadmore.

"Sculpture should distinguish itself, the strength of a sculpture lies in the fact that it should be visually light, and needs to belong to the space it's in," Poon says, paraphrasing Meadmore's teachings.

His process in achieving this visual delicacy and lightness is far more arduous and repetitive. He welds and grinds the edges till they are smoothly fused together (manually grinding them twice over), employing both additive and reductive techniques to yield the final effect.

Visible in works such as *Locus*, *Voyage*, and *Perplex*, Poon's physical and conceptual exploration of his identity and transitional move back to Hong Kong is perhaps best manifested in *Choice of Twins*. Comprising two separate, somewhat identical pieces, one purple with blue edges, and one blue with purple edges, the work essentially provides a multiplicity of perspectives. Seemingly intertwined, the composition of the sculptures provide numerous angles and ways to look at and through the objects. Perspective is never lacking, which Poon finds crucial to life in the city.

"When I came back two and half years ago, I was always having to consider other people's perspectives in my interactions, as people didn't always understand my perspective. I always had to find this balance. How does one find this balance, how do you compromise? It takes negotiation, conversations, and a bit of understanding each other to achieve this balance and sense of belonging."

A sense of belonging is determined by whether or not there is space for someone to belong. Poon creates this space within both "twin" pieces by carving out negative spaces. While both part of the sculpture and the space it inhabits, these liminal spaces allude to the cultural spaces in between. Here, Poon is essentially using form to convey a liminal space he occupies, in a world where his sense of identity and belonging isn't necessarily defined with clarity.

From highlighting the significance of multiple perspectives stemming from the same source, to physically and conceptually creating spaces for these viewpoints and identities to exist, Poon's strikes a resounding chord in today's cultural climate.

Aaina Bhargava, Arts & Culture Journalist and Editor