

FOREWORD

Dr. LEI Chin Pang, Guest Curator

“No way to be good” a solo exhibition by HONG, Wai

Anita Mui's iconic lyric "Unable to behave" from her controversial hit "Bad Girl" perfectly encapsulates the rebellious spirit that defined Hong Kong's cultural awakening. When the song was initially banned by Hong Kong Radio for its provocative themes, it paradoxically catapulted into a cultural phenomenon that resonated throughout Chinese communities.

This watershed moment didn't just mark a pinnacle in Mui's illustrious career – it fundamentally transformed Cantopop and ushered in an era of bold cultural expression that would redefine Hong Kong's identity.

In her groundbreaking exhibition, Hong Wai revisits this pivotal period through her innovative "lace calligraphy" technique. Her work transcends mere tribute to Mui and her contemporaries; it stands as a powerful artistic manifesto that weaves together femininity, cultural identity, and Hong Kong's unique historical narrative.

The brilliance of Hong Wai's chosen medium lies in its inherent contradictions. Lace, with its rich historical context, challenges gender conventions – simultaneously embodying feminine delicacy while recalling its popularity among 16th-century French nobility. Traditional Chinese calligraphy, historically dominated by male scholars, provides a perfect counterpoint with its dynamic range of expression, from forceful to ethereal.

Hong Wai masterfully incorporates Hong Kong's gender-fluid pop cultural icons into this dialogue: Anita Mui's fierce sensuality, Leslie Cheung's magnetic androgyny, and Faye Wang's raffish elegance. This unprecedented fusion of materials, cultures, and gender expressions creates a compelling commentary on Hong Kong's unique cultural landscape.

The exhibition's three series work in concert to explore these themes:

The signature Hong Kong Express series uses Chinese characters such as "妖" (evil), "烈" (blazing), "俠" (heroic), and "夕" (sunset) to represent Anita Mui and the Hong Kong culture she embodied. Her classic works—The Enchantress, Flaming Red Lips, Song of Sunset, and her heroic image—are not only iconic creations but also significant footprints of Hong Kong's pop culture.

In addition to calligraphy, this series also incorporates ink painting to depict Anita Mui's signature dark eyeshadow, the studded lace costume from Flaming Red Lips, and another legendary star, Leslie Cheung's, red high heels.

In "Paris One Life One Dream," Hong Wai expands her scope to examine the diaspora experience through portraits of immigrant women in Paris. While seemingly divergent, this series resonates deeply with Hong Kong's own narrative of migration and cultural adaptation.

The "Alternative Landscape" series represents Hong Wai's most experimental work, transforming the female form and lace into ethereal landscapes. These pieces transcend traditional Chinese landscape painting, creating a powerful metaphor for Hong Kong's cultural fluidity and endless potential.

Hong Wai's work reminds us that truly transformative art emerges from questioning established norms. As Hong Kong continues to evolve in our rapidly changing world, her exhibition serves as both a celebration of the city's rebellious spirit and a call to maintain that creative courage. The technical mastery of her lace calligraphy, combined with its rich conceptual underpinning, establishes this body of work as a significant contribution to contemporary Asian art.

This exhibition not only documents Hong Kong's cultural history but actively participates in shaping its future narrative. Through Hong Wai's lens, we see how nonconformity and artistic innovation have been – and continue to be – essential elements of Hong Kong's cultural DNA.