

YOUNG ARTIST
AWARD
2015

CHUN KAI FENG



Chun Kai Feng (b. 1982) is an artist, curator, exhibition designer and educator. He is a graduate of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Diploma) and Glasgow School of Art (Master) and has been active in the visual arts scene for over a decade.

Kai Feng employs sculptural and installation modes, inspired by notions of collective memory and socio-cultural icons. His notable works include the re-contextualisation of the National Theatre, 7-11 light boxes, orange plastic bus stop seats and concrete benches commonly found in old HDB estates. He explores themes beyond mere nostalgia as he passionately presents methods interrogating the notion of memory and introduces reflective questions about Singapore. Kai Feng and his brother, Kai Qun, spearheaded numerous initiatives promoting experimental art and introducing a new dimension to the traditional mode of curation.

Kai Feng's works have been exhibited at key institutions such as the Singapore Art Museum (2011, 2012), Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore (2014), NUS Museum (2015) as well as at commercial platforms such as ArtStage Singapore (2014) and FOST Gallery (2006 -2014). His latest work, *In Other Words, Put It Differently, That Is to Say*, was recently presented in an exhibition curated by Singaporean curator June Yap. Recently, his work *Nothing to Wait For* (2014) was acquired by M+ (museum of visual culture in the West Kowloon Cultural District of Hong Kong).

Kai Feng's list of accolades boasts the Singapore Art Exhibition Prize (2009), Merit Award for the third CDL Sculpture Award and a High Commendation at the 25th UOB Painting of the Year (2006). Kai Feng is also a recipient of the National Arts Council Arts Bursary (Overseas) (2009) and the Georgette Chen Arts Scholarship (2005-2007).

Kai Feng and his works have travelled to major cities around the world such as Glasgow, Hong Kong and Berlin. In 2013, Kai Feng was invited to participate in the Ruangrupa Art Lab, an artist residency in Jakarta and in 2015, was among the few Singaporean artists selected to participate in the XXIX^e Ateliers Internationaux du FRAC des Pays de la Loire residency in conjunction with Singapour en France – le Festival in France.



Everything You Ever Wanted to Know (2015).
Photo courtesy of Chun Kai Feng



What Happens When Nothing Happens (2014).
Photo courtesy of Chun Kai Feng



There's Absolutely Nothing We Can Do to Help You (2015).
Photo courtesy of Chun Kai Feng



Nowhere Near (2013).
Photo courtesy of Chun Kai Feng



A CONVERSATION WITH CHUN KAI FENG

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences?

My brother Kai Qun and I picked up drawing from our eldest sister Wee Ping when we were very young. As kids, we drew every day, immersing ourselves in imaginary worlds.

I remember Wee Ping teaching us a technique of drawing with wax crayons and washing over with water-based poster colours to create special textural effects. This planted the seeds for my acute awareness to material processes. Moreover, our Dad frequently took the family out for drawing competitions and we would sweep the top prizes with such techniques.

Once in a competition, Wee Ping suggested that we crayon the hair of the people in our drawings in shocking colours. It was the 1980s then, and only delinquents and misfits had dyed hair. Understandably, we did not win as we usually did because the judges thought we did the hair incorrectly. But it did not matter that we lost. We had great fun colouring in the wrong way and were amused by the exasperated expressions of the judges. This particular experience, at the age of seven, made me see that it is more exciting to challenge expectations than to win in scripted ways.

What are some of the biggest challenges you faced as an artist and curator, and how did you overcome them?

Every situation is different and difficult in its own interesting way. I have evolved to be in tune with what is in front of me. As an artist or as a curator, my process is all about working with the situation. For example, in a recent show in Institute of Contemporary of Arts Singapore at LASALLE College of the Arts, I had to make a work with the gallery's glass wall. It was something foreign for me, but it presented an opportunity to make something based on conditions I had never thought about. I adjusted my methods and ideas to negotiate these specific conditions and ended up with a fresh new work which I felt will open up to another series of works.

Many of your works are inspired by notions of collective memory and socio-cultural icons. Can you elaborate on your fascination with these topics?

I only make works based on things I truly know. Doing otherwise would be pretentious and depthless. I walk among objects such as HDB concrete benches, 7-11 light box signs, public waste bins and stainless steel railings on a daily basis. Gradually, I developed a personal sense of understanding about these objects. These things shape the stories of my life. Making works with them is a means of articulating an experience of existing amongst objects.

What do you want the audience to experience through your work?

I hope my viewer will find the work interesting without any explanation from me.

What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in visual arts?

Practice makes perfect, you make good art by making lots of mistakes.

Tell us more about how you intend to further grow and contribute in the arts scene.

I am aiming for longevity and would like to make interesting and relevant works for as long as I can. I let one situation grow slowly into another. With the experience, knowledge and support I gather along the way, I hope to actively share with peers and younger artists.

WORDS OF APPRECIATION

I would like to express my gratitude to Heman Chong for nominating me. The recognition from such a formidable artist has given me great motivation.

I would like to credit National Arts Council for the subsidised studio scheme. The affordability of the space has lifted considerable financial burden off my shoulders, allowing me to concentrate wholeheartedly on art-making.

I would like to thank Stephanie Fong of FOST Gallery for her continuous hard work in promoting my works. The art market is not all about money - it is also about people. I have been collaborating with FOST Gallery since its founding and I have grown a lot through these years.

My sincere thanks also goes to all the people I have worked with. Your comments and ideas have given me abundant inspiration.

I would like to thank my family: my parents and my sisters for supporting me spiritually and financially throughout. I am extremely apologetic for not sharing the household burden all these years.

I would like to thank Gan Zhen Yi, for being the joyful spark in my life and for lifting me up whenever I am in gloom.

Lastly, I would like to thank my twin brother and squabbling partner, Chun Kai Qun. An artist's life is an arduous journey, and to have him on this endeavour has made it more bearable in infinite ways.