

HERE AND THERE: RE-IMAGINING HONG KONG LANDSCAPES

極目足下

想・見香港風光

看什麼？畫什麼？ 風景畫的抉擇 DRAW WHAT YOU SEE: THE CHOICES OF LANDSCAPE PAINTING

● 丁穎茵

● Ting Wing Yan, Vivian

◎ 劉偉娟 英文譯本

◎ English Translation by Lau Wai Kuen, Caddie

往昔不復見

為什麼畫家黃進曦抹去眼前石屎森林的痕跡，描繪往日九龍風光？在這影像泛濫的年代，隨便在網上搜尋歷史圖片，不就將半島這百多年來的變遷看得一清二楚？何況，這是發展一日千里、沒有人相信永恒的流動世代，誰又需要靜態的圖像作品定止的某時某刻？藝評家 John Berger 曾經抱怨：

「『轉瞬即逝』這一想法被實用主義和消費主義糊弄得俗氣，促使抽象藝術將之排除在外，唯有普普藝術和追隨者加以盲目崇拜，令它翻起過一陣子潮流。『轉瞬即逝』不再訴諸超越時間的永恒，變得跟瑣碎又速食的潮流一樣。當人不再承認剎那與永恒可以並存，圖像藝術也就無所作為。」¹

一直以來，繪畫讓人看到難以看得清楚、甚或非肉眼所看得到的物事。但是，黃進曦的創作想要蓋過今天人人看得見的風景，重現不復再見的過去。他描畫的是當下永遠缺席的「現場」、亦即 Berger 所指的「轉瞬即逝」。為什麼藝術家與人分享消失的風景？他又如何回應圖像藝術無所作為的質疑？

研究介入創作

作為策展人，我不懂得應付 Berger 的詰問。目前我們需要的，確實不是沉醉往日的鄉愁幻象，而是解構、辨析、再重構萬象世界的見識。可是，我無法斷然拒絕藝術家的新嘗試，畢竟策展是團隊成員交流、論辯與實驗的平台，也是創意火花落實到作品的探索旅程。《極目足下》這一展覽強調以研究主導，期望與研究員及藝術家從眼前的香港風光發掘風景地貌演變的原由，思考風景所觸及的想像、認同與回憶。籌備展覽的過程，策展團隊不時與藝術家分享研究所得、策劃田野考察，又多番討論特定風景於藝術家創作的意義，務求將藝術家對景觀的身體感知、無以名狀的情緒以及知性思考，一一沉澱成有意義的本土論述。

與黃進曦討論風景寫生，我看到藝術家的寫生速寫稿、也聽到他如何將行山所見所思轉化為畫布上的山光水色^{fig 1}。當他提出摹描往日九龍半島面貌，策展團

隊找來了各式各樣的檔案資料——攝影師的城市紀錄、政府年報與地政發展藍圖、旅遊指南的觀光介紹等，試圖重現煙消雲散的過去。然而，翻閱一大堆資料，我們發覺歷史資料總是掛一漏萬、圖像記錄也不過是朦朧印象而已。儘管九龍群山——飛鵝山、象山、大老山、慈雲山、雞胸山、獅子山、筆架山、鷹巢山與琵琶山——架成屏障庇蔭著維多利亞港以北的地域，但石屎森林的拓張卻早已驅使鋼根水泥插入高高低低的山坡、甚至架起另一道灰茫茫的屏風遮蔽著青山與白雲。即使看過了移山填海的工程規劃圖，我仍然搞不清如何從筆直的海岸線找回往日犬牙交錯的海灣；就算文獻清楚標記某村某圍的人家，我也不知道他們棲居於那片土地的何方。文獻研究介入了風景畫的創作並非旨在重建「現實」，而是透過歷史記述與藝術家的想像估算出消失的山脈、耕地與植坡。

遙望 1860 年代…

抹去眼前所見的石屎森林，黃進曦向觀眾呈現了 1860 年代港島對岸的海浪與山巒。當時九龍半島指界限街以南的尖沙嘴、油麻地、旺角、紅磡、土瓜灣等地區，主要被視為英軍據點。² 在這片尚未開發的土地，政府報告錄得十條村莊合共五千多名居民容身於此。³ 藝術家抹出一片片天藍、水藍與山影藍，將觀眾的眼睛帶到彎彎曲曲的海灣。這是大自然給水面人留著作躲避風雨的停歇處，由得他們在此與岸上人做交易、修築廟宇祭祀神明等。遊目四顧，畫家筆下的重重青山，竟然裸露出一块块泥黃與土紅。許是天然資源不多，農民不得不斫伐林木開墾耕地、刈撻草坡用作燃料，再顧不上養著茸茸植坡。山腳下，村子散落其間，村民背靠著茂密的風水林得到生活所需，又因著山谷水道而滋養出層層梯田與片片稻田。⁴

1860 年代的九龍半島主要由水面人與岸上農民的生活方式塑造出一片漁農景觀。農村生產的稻米、蔬菜與柴木供應市區的日用，農產品貿易的商機也改善了村民的生計、令他們有望得到在社會向上流動的機會^{fig 2}。⁵ 看見畫家演繹的舊日時光，我們看到了什麼？過去的生活方式？城鄉互動的想像？抑或人力加諸自然的省思？

細看 1950 年代…

1950 年代的九龍半島是黃進曦與觀眾分享的另一頁時光片段。畫家筆下的青山添上了硬生生的石褐與炭紫，觀眾赫然看見一幢幢樓房進駐海邊、盤踞山間，木屋、棚屋、天台木屋、紙皮屋等違例建築更是肆無忌憚的由九龍西大埔道一直向東蔓延至觀塘、秀茂坪一帶。⁶ 其時，香港正自三年零八個月的陰霾復蘇過來，人口又急速膨脹，由 1945 年 60 萬人擢升至 1950 年逾 200 萬人，令住屋、交通、衛生等公共設施不勝負荷。不過，人口急升既帶來社會危機，卻也帶來經濟發展的動力。就連看似髒亂不堪的寮屋區也發展出小本企業與家庭式工廠，形成與城市化並行的另一社會經濟網絡^{fig 3}。⁷

戰後見證著九龍半島發展的新里程。1948 年，政府請來英國城市規劃專家亞柏康比 (Patrick Abercrombie) 就城市發展提供建議。亞柏康比指香港的難題在於城市核心區域欠缺拓展空間、人口又不斷遞增，遂提出填海增加土地供應，訂定全盤規劃致力發展九龍半島。⁸ 往後幾十年，政府將紅磡設計為交通運輸樞紐，油麻地進一步擴展成輕工業及商業區，觀塘與荔枝角發展成工業區，而長沙灣與土瓜灣等地則成為厭惡行業的基地，收容打鐵工場、造船廠與屠房等。⁹ 戰後的九龍半島帶著一飛衝天的幹勁，歸根究柢，這有賴於 20 世紀初，政府逐步拓展城市的核心範圍，將深水埗、荔枝角、長沙灣、九龍塘、九龍城、九龍灣、牛頭角、觀塘、茶果嶺等地劃定為新九龍，並且實施連串工程平整土地、興建道路、開闢交通網絡。¹⁰

fig 1 & A

黃進曦的創作將行山親歷其景的身體經驗，轉化為色彩斑斕的山水圖像，令人驚豔於本地風光之美。Stephen's paintings transform his bodily experience of hiking into visual representations of colourful landscapes, astounding in the beauty of the local scenery.



fig 2

九龍半島曾是一片片農地，農地所產供應著市區所需。這段歷史正好讓人重新思考城鄉互動的另一種模式。

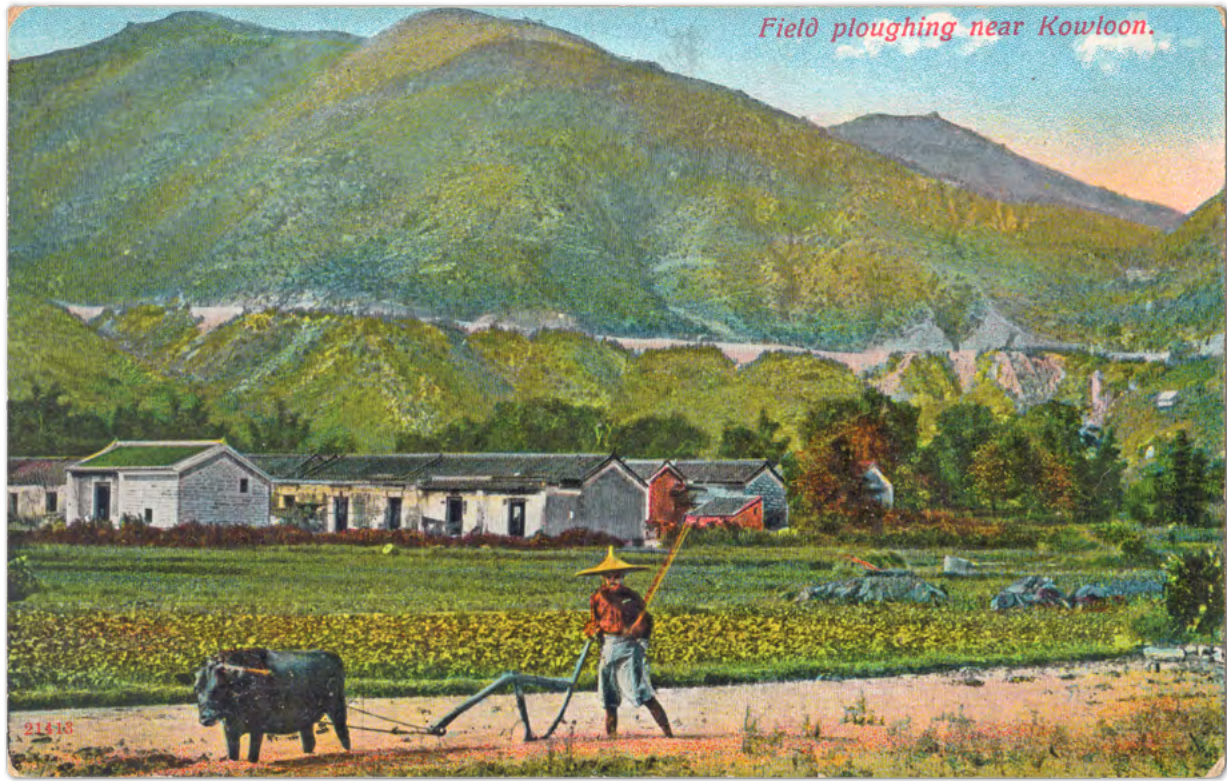


fig B

In the mid-19th century, farmlands across the Kowloon Peninsula supplied agricultural produce for the urban areas. This enables people to rethink another mode of urban-rural interaction.



fig 3 & C

戰後九龍半島的發展一日千里，城市規劃著眼於地區的土地用途，將之劃為商業區、工業區、住宅區等。回望過去，我們不得不問規劃如何釐定自身對地方的想像？

After the war, the Kowloon Peninsula developed rapidly, and urban planning focused on land use, defining the area into commercial, industrial, and residential zones. But, looking back, we have to ask how planning determines our imagination of a place.

重看 2020 年代...

今天黃進曦邀請觀眾再看九龍半島。群山與藍天依舊，但一座座光鮮亮麗的高樓大廈傲然排雲列陣，彷彿再也容不下一角無所事事的空地、一家亂岔岔的雜貨鋪，甚至一個衣著隨便、踏著拖鞋的小市民。畫家將照片印在畫布上，以直白又冷靜的方式展示當前城市發展的模樣，卻又在同一系列的畫作塗抹出早已消散的舊日剪影。藝術家畫出過去，亦即抹走當下，在古與今、看見與看不見之間，觀眾認得出什麼？又記得什麼？

藝術家無法訴諸海枯石爛的永恒，作品所呈現的風景亦注定煙消雲散。當觀眾看到曾經鮮活的過去、追認地貌變遷的由來，或許每個人也可以由此發掘、演繹、保留這一道風景於自身的意義。如此一來，風景畫或得以溢出框架、溢展出廳，建構出不同人觀看地方的意義。



THE PAST THAT CAN NEVER RETURN

Why does Wong Chun Hei, Stephen wipe away traces of this concrete jungle and instead portray the Kowloon of the past in his paintings? In a time in which we are inundated with digital images, it is too easy for us to search the Internet for historical pictures of the changes that the peninsula has gone through over more than a century. Moreover, the mobile generation has seen a dramatically fast pace in the development of technologies and no longer believes in timelessness. Who needs still images to capture a certain moment? Art critic John Berger once complained:

“Banalised by pragmatism and consumerism, the ephemeral was excluded from abstract art, or fetishised as short-lived fashion in pop art and its derivatives. The ephemera, no longer appealing to the timeless, becomes as trivial and instant as the fashionable. Without an acknowledged coexistence of the ephemeral and the timeless, there is nothing of consequence for pictorial art to do.”¹

Painting has been known for its ability to shed light on objects and scenery that are hard to see clearly or even invisible to naked eye. Stephen’s works, however, aim to go further by eclipsing our contemporary vision of Kowloon’s scenery and recreating a past that can never return. What he paints is the “present moment” that is always absent in the present, the “ephemera” as described by Berger. Why does the artist share with us these disappearing landscapes? How does he respond to the question of pictorial art doing nothing of consequence?

THE USE OF RESEARCH IN ARTISTIC PRACTICE

As the curator of this exhibition, I do not know how to answer Berger’s question. What we need now is not an immersion in the illusory past but the knowledge of deconstructing, analysing and reconstructing all natural manifestations. Despite that, I could not refuse to let the artist try out new things. After all, the curating process provides my team with a platform for the exchange of and experimentation with different ideas, forming a journey of imagination through which art is created. Rooted in research, the exhibition *Here and There: Re-imagining Hong Kong Landscapes* aims to let the researchers and the artists explore the transformation of Hong Kong’s landscape, while reflecting on the imagination, identities and recollections inspired by the landscape. During the preparations for the exhibition, my curatorial team often shared with the artist their research outcomes and

organised field trips. We also held frequent discussions about the significance of certain landscapes in the artist’s work for a discursive understanding of his physical perception of the landscapes, as well as the indefinable emotions and thoughts that he experienced in the painting process.

While discussing landscape painting and sketching with Stephen, I examined his drawings and sketches, and listened to his explanations of how he turned his observations and thoughts into alluring and colourful mountains and seas on canvas ^{fig A}. He suggested depicting the Kowloon peninsula of the past, and the curatorial team immediately searched through all kinds of archival materials — photographic records of the city, the government’s yearbooks, layout plans released by the Lands Department, and descriptions of travel guidebooks — in an attempt to recreate the faded past. However, after going through a heavy pile of materials, we found that there was always something missing in historical documents, and that pictorial records were merely vague impressions. Although sheltered by the mountains of Kowloon — Kowloon Peak, Middle Hill, Tate’s Cairn, Temple Hill, Unicorn Ridge, Lion Rock, Beacon Hill, Eagle’s Nest and Piper’s Hill — the area north of Victoria Harbour has been disturbed by the expansion of the concrete jungle, in which reinforcing bars and concrete are built into the hilly slopes and even form a grey wall blocking the view of the verdant mountains and white clouds. Even if I looked at layout plans of projects levelling hills and reclaiming land from the sea, I still could not locate from the straightened coast a sea bay fringed by a ragged coastline. If there is a house marked in a walled village on an old map, I cannot tell where the house is on that piece of land. The use of evidential research does not help recapture “reality” in landscape painting, but instead aims to provide a conjecture about the expanse of mountains, farmland and vegetation that have disappeared along with the artist’s imagination.

GAZING BACK AT THE 1860S

Leaving out the urban jungle of high-rise buildings, Stephen presents to his audiences the undulating waves and mountain ranges across Hong Kong Island in the 1860s. The Kowloon Peninsula, referring to the present-day Tsim Sha Tsui, Yau Ma Tei, Mongkok, Hung Hom and To Kwa Wan south of Boundary Street, was regarded as a base at which the British military had personnel stationed.² According to a government report, there were once ten villages inhabited by more than 5,000 people on this piece of undeveloped land.³ The shades of pale azure, aqua blue and cerulean on the painting direct the viewer’s gaze towards the unspoilt bay trimmed by a meandering coastline. A

gift of nature, this shelter shields water dwellers from stormy weather, while also allowing them to trade with those living onshore and build temples for the deities they worship. Looking around, the overlapping green mountains show smudges of yellow ochre and burnt umber. Perhaps, owing to limited natural resources, peasants had to cut down the forest to make space for farming and collect wild grass for fuel. They could not care for the mossy vegetation covering the slopes. The villages were scattered at the foot of the mountains, whose bushy forests provided villagers with ample resources and whose rivers, flowing between the valleys, irrigated their crops in the terraced fields and rice fields.⁴

In the 1860s, the Kowloon Peninsula was inhabited by fishermen and peasants whose lifestyles contributed to the rural landscape of the fishing and farming communities. The rice, vegetables and firewood produced in the villages were supplied to the people living in town ^{fig B}. The selling of farm products gave the villagers a better livelihood and a chance to move up in society.⁵ What do we see in the artist’s interpretation of the olden days? Ways of living of the past? The artist’s imagination of interactions between villages? Or his reflections on the effects of humanity on nature?

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE 1950S

Stephen has also chosen to share the Kowloon Peninsula of the 1950s with his audience. He defines his greenish mountains with smears of dull brown and greyish violet and hard, crisp edges, and depicts bungalows appearing suddenly along the coast and on the hills. Unauthorised buildings, such as squatter huts, stilt houses, roof-top squatter houses and cardboard box shelters, trail unscrupulously from Tai Po Road in West Kowloon all the way to Kwun Tong and Sau Mau Ping.⁶ It was a time of hardship when Hong Kong was recovering from the three years and eight months of Japanese occupation. The population grew rapidly from 600,000 in 1945 to more than 2,000,000 in 1950, adding pressure to housing, traffic, public hygiene and healthcare. The surge in population posed a threat of social crisis, but also gave immediate impetus to economic growth. Small businesses and family-run factories were developed even in the seemingly dirty and chaotic squatter areas, creating a unique socio-economic network that existed along the path of urbanisation.⁷

The 1950s saw a series of milestones achieved during the development of the Kowloon Peninsula. In 1948, the government invited British urban

planner Patrick Abercrombie to advise on Hong Kong’s urban development. Abercrombie pointed out that the main problem Hong Kong faced was the lack of expansion space in the core districts, aggravated by the continuous growth of the population. To address the problem, he suggested the government should reclaim land to increase land supply and undertake holistic planning for the development of the peninsula.⁸ In the following decades, the government assigned different roles to the areas in Kowloon. Hung Hom was transformed into a transportation hub. Yau Ma Tei was expanded into a commercial and light industrial district. Kwun Tong and Lai Chi Kok were developed into industrial areas, while Cheung Sha Wan and To Kwa Wan served as bases for unpopular trades, being occupied by iron factories, shipyards and slaughterhouses.⁹ The Kowloon Peninsula soared to new heights in the post-war period. Ultimately, its success hinged on the government’s expansion of the core districts in the early 20th century. Sham Shui Po, Lai Chi Kok, Cheung Sha Wan, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon City, Kowloon Bay, Ngau Tau Kok, Kwun Tong and Cha Kwo Ling were designated as parts of New Kowloon ^{fig C}, where a series of construction projects were launched to form new land, build new roads and expand transportation networks.¹⁰

A FRESH VIEW OF THE PRESENT

Today Stephen asks the audience to take another look at the Kowloon Peninsula. The blue sky and mountains remain the same, but in the sea of glamorous skyscrapers, there seems no room for a corner of land that has nothing built on, a grocery store with messy shelves or even a sloppily-dressed, slipper-clad resident. The painter presents the current development of the city in a calm, candid manner by printing photos directly on the canvases, on which he then paints the city’s long gone past. By painting the past over the present, he obliterates the present. Between the past and the present, the visible and the invisible, what does the audience recognise? What can they remember?

It is indeed impossible for the artist to express the timeless existence of a landscape; after all, over time, even seas will run dry and mountains crumble. The scenery in Stephen’s works is destined to vanish like smoke in the future. When the audiences look into a past that was once lively, they are able to trace the changes of these places in Kowloon over the years. Perhaps this is how we can discover, interpret and preserve the meaning of landscapes on our own terms. Thus, the impact of a landscape painting can extend beyond the context of its frame or exhibition, bringing different meanings of a place to different viewers.

看什麼？畫什麼？風景畫的抉擇

Draw What You See: The Choices

of Landscape Painting

- 1 John Berger, "Painting and Time", in *The Sense of Sight: Writing by John Berger* (New York: Vintage International, 1985), 210.
- 2 何佩然：《城傳立新：香港城市規劃發展史（1841—2015）》（香港：中華書局，2016年），頁10、67、82。
Pui-yin Ho, *Cheng chuan lixin: Xianggang changsha guihua fazhan shi 1841—2015* (Inheritance and Development: A History of Urban Planning and Development in Hong Kong 1841—2015) (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Co., 2016), 10, 67, 82.
- 3 James Hayes, "Old British Kowloon", *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol.6, 1966, 121.
- 4 Patrick H. Hase, *Custom, Land and Livelihood in Rural South China: The Traditional Land Law of Hong Kong's New Territories, 1750—1950* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), 11—12.
- 5 James Hayes, "Old British Kowloon", 125.
- 6 馮邦彥：《香港地產史 1841—2020》（香港：中華書局，2021年），頁54—59。
Feng Bangyan, *Xianggang dichan shi* (History of Real Estate Development in Hong Kong) (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Co., 2021), 54—59.
- 7 Barrie Shelton, Justyna Karakiewicz, and Thomas Kvan, *The Making of Hong Kong: From Vertical to Volumetric* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 68.
- 8 何佩然：《地換山移：香港海港及土地發展一百六十年》（香港：商務印書館，2004年），頁137—139。
Pui-yin Ho, *Dihuan shanyi: Xianggang haigang ji tudi fazhan yibai liushi nian* (Challenges for an Evolving City: 160 Years of Port and Land Development in Hong Kong) (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 2004), 137—139;
Lawrence Wai-Chug Lai, "Reflections on the Abercrombie Report 1948: A Strategic Plan for Colonial Hong Kong", *The Town Planning Review*, vol 70, no. 1 (Jan 1999), 61—87.
- 9 何佩然：《城傳立新：香港城市規劃發展史（1841—2015）》，頁143、159、161—162、174。
Pui-yin Ho, *Cheng chuan lixin: Xianggang changsha guihua fazhan shi 1841—2015*, 143, 159, 161—162, 174.
- 10 Alan Smart and Wing-shing Tang, "On the Threshold of Urban Hong Kong: Liminal Territoriality in New Kowloon," In Allan Charles Dawson and et al (eds.), *Negotiating Territoriality: Spatial Dialogues between State and Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 230—248.