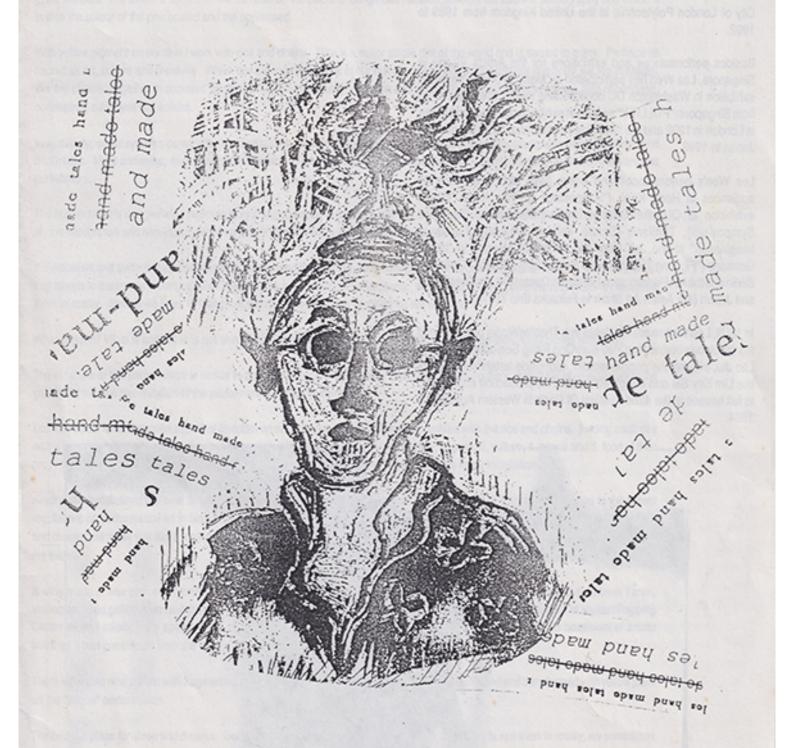
# SENTALES TALES

BY LEE WEN 14 - 16 MARCH 1996 THE BLACK BOX 8PM



THE CUTTING EDGE [no, not the arts festival...]

### ABOUT LEE WEN

LEE WEN studied at the LaSalle-SIA College of The Arts and the City of London Polytechnic in the United Kingdom from 1989 to 1992.

Besides performances and exhibitions for the Artists Village in Singapore, Lee Wen has participated in "Many In One" a travelling exhibition in Washington DC documenting twenty five years of art from Singapore; "PULLIT X" a series of exhibitions cumperformances in London in 1992 and the 5th Fukui International Video Biennale in Japan in 1993.

Lee Wen's performances and works have also been seen by audiences in Hong Kong ("Happenings II" The Artists Village exhibition at QU" Art Gallery), India (International Sculpture Symposium), Thailand (Sense Yellow), Poland ("Castle of Imagination" at the 3rd International Artists Meeting in 1995), Germany ("Fighting The Universal Spider" at the A and O Gallery in Berlin and the MA Performance Festival in Dusseldorf and Darmstedt) and Japan (4th Asian Art Show in Fukuoka and Tokyo).

In 1993, Lee Wen made his debut in a TheatreWorks production of the much celebrated Kuo Pao Kun/Ong Keng Sen collaboration of Lao Jiu, playing the puppet master, alongside established actors like Lim Kay Siu and Margaret Chan. This production also played to full houses at the 42nd Festival Of Perth in Western Australia in 1994.



I am already yellow. Why do I still paint myself yellow? Yellow is the colour of the sun, the colour of the moon, the colour of the river that runs in the old country. It is the spirit of nobility, the glow of precious gold. The warmth and abundance of harvest, the power and faith in the temples. In a different sense, yellow can also be the colour of dangerous hazards, confidential secrets, pornography and vices. It is also the colour of the presecuted and the oppressed.

With yellow pigment on my skin I work with rice and chains. Rice is a major staple diet of the world and is sacred to many. Perhaps as sacred as art, culture and creativity. Which are essential elements of our human civilisation. And within our humanity, we live in chains. We are chained together in societies for strength, comfort, security, direction and continuity. These chains which are also of bondage, constraints, rules and regulations.

Increasingly, social systems demand that art and culture must serve its needs. Individualism is being suppressed by various controls and restrictions. More and more, human nature is evolving to serve society's needs and behaviour is being moulded by coercive reward and punishment.

The human heart is a caged wing yearning to fly and sing a song of freedom. We live in a tension between our desires and our fears. Fears of non-recognition and non-identity within a power system designed with rejection and intolerance.

Individualism and selfhood become stagnant, stunted and fragmented, seeking reconcilement, completion and recovery. We who are "i's" that sleeps to dream our dreams of unfulfilled desires and incomplete aspirations. With these dreams come the responsibility to realise them in reality. Should we have to face them with a readiness to be crucified for our dreams?

What is good? What is bad? This is not skin alone. Beneath the ocean of compassion, there is no skin. Only bones and blood.

The structure of this performance is similar to that of Number 3 in this series. I am present in the gallery during the opening hours of the gallery for the five day duration of the performance as the "yellow man".

I concentrated on one chosen aspect of freedom on each day as I contemplated and worked with the rice and chains. Ending each day with a mandala/picture based on the chosen aspect of freedom, such as: 1. democracy; 2. work, 3. culture, 4. peace and 5. food. I then proceeded to end the day's performance with a closing ritual, interacting with some objects in my installation.

Among the installations are nine oil paintings which are covered with black velvet cloth. This act of "censorship" alludes to the recent regulations on performance art in Singapore. Red crosses were painted on these "black velvet" paintings and were whipped with ropes and chains during the first day's "democracy" performance. Also on the fifth day's "lood" performance, three of these were anointed with my tears.

A wing made of wax sits uncomfortably inside a cage. I carried this during the "culture" performance walking around downtown Tenjin, visiting some art galleries and exhibitions of the "Museum City Tenjin" project. Ironically, I was stopped by the manager of Imuzu Shopping Centre when I attempted a spontaneous performance on Ozawa Tsuyoshi's large newspaper installation on the basement of Imuzu building. I had permission from the artist, Ozawa but unfortunately, not the "management".

There were also nine panels with fragmented images of my body. These images were further disfigured and transformed with yellow paint on the "peace" performance.

The bed is a place for sleep and dreams. Our unfulfilled desires manifest in our dreams. If we want to see them in reality, we sometimes have to be prepared to be crucified for them. Hence on this "bed-cross" was whipped, wrapped with a black cloth, layed upon and carried during the "democracy", "work", "peace" and "food" performances.

After the five-day performance, I put the rice into ten "sake" bottles which were labelled with woodcut prints I made in the museum's workshop. I also made nine more panels with photo-images from the final day "lood" performance. These images were superimposed with the following poem which I had used during the performance...

### JOURNEY OF A YELLOW MAN

continued

All foetuses begin as female.

Only in the third month of gestation

does masculinization begin.

Only in the third month of gestation

does masculinization begin.

All foetuses begin as female.

All foetuses begin as female.

All foetuses begin as female.

Children are intuitive moralists

Chidren are intuitive moralists

The process of interactions with family and friends is a learning product.

Japanese and Israeli, although having radically differing Mother-Child relationships in child rearing, have in their society,

Relatively and equally low rates of entering into delinquency And criminal careers in the western sense

Freedom is a self-evident good. But.

But. The Chinese consider freedom as "Licentiousness" and

"Valorisation of personal liberty".

What is considered freedom may not have self-evident values in some cultures.

Harmony and conformity is prized higher than freedom sometimes. Somtimes.

"Consensual Marriages" prepare the ground for extension of individualism.

Does a good life depend on "rights" or "virtues"?

Are rights inherent only in individuals or more importantly in groups?

Which is better, "group centered" or "individual-centred" cultures?

For some, individualism implies universalism.

Since if each person is morally equivalent

then all peoples are morally equivalent.

"Immoral behaviour" does not imply weakness of moral sense

The problem of wrong action arises from conflict among several different moral senses.

This struggle. This struggle.

This struggle between "morality" and "self-interest" has a corrosive effect on those forces that blunt the moral senses. Some cultures emphasize duty and self-control.

Other cultures emphasize sympathy and fairness.

Too much. Too much. Too much individualism leads to stiffness, uneasiness and alienation submission to authorities. Submission to authorities and unquestioning lead to lack of choice and loss of individual assertiveness.

What happens to society?

Which question is asked depends on who is asking now.

TV, newspapers and print presses have far-reaching ability to eliminate the media opposition to ruling cultures.

Therefore the ruling cultures may not allow them to do so without license.

Cultures attempt to purge freedom various factions of media are strong armed into submission.

Licensing and regulation controls the ownership of media oppositions to the ruling culture.

The division of media control stocks into 2 classes of "historically-proven" idea.

Only "management" have voting rights and must have the approval from the ruling culture.

"Non-citizens" need not apply.

"Foreign Investors" must not be from extremely differing cultures from the ruling cultures.

Global culture today.

Global culture in today's world accepts every human being as citizens.

Global culture in today's world is slowly learning that all living beings are citizens.

Who opposes the ruling cultures shall be defined by the "management" of the "management" as "foreign".

Those who oppose the ruling culture are "foreign" and cannot be the "management".

"Nothing against the system. Nothing without the system. Nothing lives outside the system." is the implied secret argument.

Since doing is difficult...

Speaking must be more cautious.

Since doing is difficult

Speaking becomes a cautious effort.

Since doing is difficult.

Speak cautiously...

- Lee Wen



"Baba" was a derogatory term for the Straits-born Chinese, used by the more recent arrival of other Chinese immigrants. They called them "baba" because the Straits-born Chinese have mostly lost the ability to speak their ancestral Chinese language fluently. Today we use the more politically correct term, "peranakan", to describe this unique marriage of Malay and Chinese cultures amongst the Straits-born Chinese.

"Dada" was a short-lived (1916 - 1922) but dynamic art movement which responded to the industrial age and was born out of despair from the First World War. "Dada" was often frowned upon for questioning established values, morals and aesthetics which they had lost faith in and found them meaningless after experiencing the catastrophic destruction of the great war. However, their iconoclasm and seemingly irrational antics should not be simply dismissed as negative nihilism. Theirs were calculated efforts for liberation, renewal and the rediscovery of creativity. The use of chance and encouragement of spontaneity spurred a broaden imagination and expanded consciousness. It led to many new movements and gave us hope for other possibilities.

The "babas" or peranakan is a less self-conscious evolution of cross-fertilisation of cultures arising out of expediency. The Straits-born Chinese found themselves in a foreign land and surrounded by a charming people with customs that is more conducive to the climate and terrain. It was a natural process of adopting the local new ways and incorporating their old ways from their old country.

The recent developments in history, nation-building and restructuring of society in education, employment and entertainment, strains the identity of the individuals in society. Not everyone can conform to strict regulated expectations of the "ruling" culture which defines social norms. There is a proliferation of difference in tastes, values and attitudes despite a carrot and stick/reward and punishment inculcation to enforce identity within a restrictive social heirarchy.

Over the last decade, many new forms of art is evolving in Singapore. Artists are adopting new strategies, experimenting with different mediums and discovering frontiers and processes. No doubt some of these were precedented by artists in the west, but they are not entirely alien to Asian or Singaporean roots. In many rituals and customs of South-East Asia, we find what we might call installationand performance in the contemporary sense. For example, the Chinese perform elaborate rituals to commemorate the dead during Qing Ming and the seventh month "Hungry Ghosts" festivals. These often have features of "installation" and "performance" if we look at them from a modern perspective. Furthermore, many of these rituals have undergone various adjustments and modifications to suit modernisation.

## GHOSTS

I

\*Congratulations!

You've lived another hundred years. Survival is the thing.

You don't need to read the newspapers or watch television to know what's going on.

Bad news reaches you wherever you go. If you have ears. All you need is a question mark. To keep you on your guard. Monkey see, Monkey do.

Do we really know what we are fighting for?
Do we really know what we are fiving for?
Do we really know what we are dying for?
Enough of dying!!!
I want to live...I want to live...

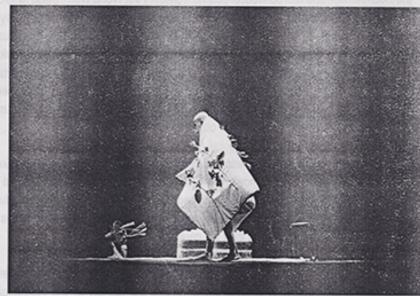
They killed the chickens, to scare the monkeys. So back to zero. Then count again. Start again. Don't go back to zero. Keep on counting. See where it leads you. It's our destiny. Unless you want history to repeat itself. Don't give up. You have a choice. Beware of fast cars and condominiums.

In some places, they still worship the half-blind kings.
Do they see?
See no evil....Hear no evil....Do no evil....

It's a promise.

If we play the game, we will get the prize.
The whole prize, from beginning to end.
But there's no such need for those who love.
But there's much to lose...and to fear.
The loss of power. The loss of gold and silver.
The darkness of morality.
Don't you want to live forever?

The chickens are dead, you are alive ... \*



I

Despite encouraging liberalisation in this century, modern society still maintains itself in a hierarchical order. Such a system tends to trivialise the individual's rights and exaggerate the ruling sovereign powers. The ultimate "unfreedom" then is that of detention without an open trial. It is one thing to punish the severely deviant through legitimate jurisdiction in an open trial. But one suspects the justice of detention without an open trial where detainees are at the mercy of their jailers.

Furthermore, a system that allows such measures of social control, never hesitates to use it to deter other expressions of liberal minority views. Especially those deemed to be oppositional to the ruling system. It is often also used as the underlying intimidation to control the media, art, literature, culture, sexual deviations and preferences...etc. which may seem to threaten the perpetuation of the ruling system.



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Lee Wen

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THEATREWORKS, a charity and non-profit organisation, is an independent Singaporean theatre company which develops and nurtures professional theatre skills. It is dedicated to reaching a broad section of the community and to taking Singapore theatre abroad. The company recognises its responsibility in encouraging awareness on human and social issues. Ultimately, TheatreWorks is inspired by and dedicated to sharing the Magic of Theatre.

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### THE CUTTING EDGE

[no, not the arts festival...]

BE HIP BE NEW BE THERE!

are you ready for the next millennium?

THE CUTTING EDGE [no, not the arts festival...] began on 29 February with the sell out production, THE YANG FAMILY. It was followed last week by Zai Kuning's production of GROWING MADNESS: THE DAY AFTER.

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THE CUTTING EDGE [no, not the arts festival...] will prove that there is a lot more happening in the Singapore arts scene than meets the eye.

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