The 21st ifva Media Art Category Jury Meeting Transcript

Jury Members: Bryan Chung (Chung), Eve Tam (Tam), Erkki Huhtamo (Huhtamo),
Maurice Benayoun (Benayoun), Ng Tsz Kwan (Ng)

ifva representative: Kattie Fan (Fan), Emily Ng (Emily)

Huhtamo: When I was trying ***MinkeyFamily.com*** with a mouse, the only thing I was able to do was modifying the viewpoint, but I didn't find any hotspots. Do you think I missed something?

Benayoun: There are many layers to this work, but the navigation is not easy. There are many elements put together, and I'm not totally sure about the coherence of the whole thing. It's just a catalogue of possibilities of interpretation of personal data.

Tam: It's not that there are different layers, there are many different pages. But how you navigate it with the mouse...there are technical issues to be explored.

Benayoun: One page is rotating slowly. Other pages you have a map, photo albums. For me it's a scattered possibility of interpretation, without having each path going as far as possible, and without connecting them together in a holistic vision of what is family.

Huhtamo: The work is interesting, but I was unable to get very far into the work.

Ng: It was definitely difficult to navigate, and it seems like there is no direct connection between the different pages. I don't know if it's intentional, or if the mouse is not working.

Tam: When we selected the work in the first round, there is a video showing how it works, and it's more interactive than it is now. I don't think it's very well adapted to the gallery setting.

Huhtamo: Is it playing in offline mode?

Fan: It's online.

Tam: It's supposed to be a lot more interactive and interesting than what is presented here.

Huhtamo: I wanted to start with discussing this work because it raises a big question. Can we say that the work is not installed properly, that there's some promise in it, but that doesn't completely reveal itself in all its complexity?

Benayoun: We have to assess what we see, there is no other option. We cannot just fantasize about what it could be, we can perhaps give some advice about how to make the navigation better. This is how a work becomes weak, is when you have a feeling that the artists don't make choices, but say, "I can do that, and that, and that..." I can tell you for which

project I have this feeling: *Light Barrier*. You see the first image, that of a mirror with a concave image, it's very nice and subtle. It's a catalogue of possibilities: you see what you get with a square projected, a line projected...

Huhtamo: The other issue I have is that because this is shown as a documentation of a very large work, it's very hard to give an award to a work that's not shown in the proper way. This is a common problem in juries when doing pre-selection work based on DVDs or YouTube videos. I have been in juries where mistakes have been made because the final outcome is very different from the submitted video, and the final version doesn't live up to the promise.

Tam: This issue applies to most of the works. When we assessed the proposals in the first round some of them are meant to be an installation rather than an interactive work. When they arrive in Hong Kong, they have to adapt to the space, and have only a limited budget, so they have to present it in another way. But in the end it's up to the artist whether they accept this alternative way of presentation, and he or she has to resolve how to make their ideas come across in another way aesthetically. For smaller works it is easier to achieve what they set out to do in the proposal.

Benayoun: In the same room as *Light Barrier*, we have *Ming Jing*. One is physically present and the other is in video.   The video is very nice with nice lighting, whereas with *Ming Jing*, the lighting could be better. It could be better in the dark. I think *Ming Jing* is so much more interesting because it's about behavior, society and collective relation.

Huhtamo: What's happening is triggered by things happening in Beijing, by somebody entering a gallery in Beijing, which makes this work even more interesting.

Benayoun: This is a strong work because of its visual qualities. There is an emotional impact, which is something you have to take into account.

Huhtamo: I also found *Ming Jing* to be a very strong work, and I viewed it for 40 minutes, during which time there were two or three strong reactions in sound, and also smaller, subtle reactions with light. There are magnetic processes going on, which I find very interesting. The work creates a presence that is bigger than the visual presence. It is tempting standing next to it and wait for something to happen. It may also have some political relevance or make a commentary about telematics. On the surface it looks like a formal, quiet installation, but hides deeper layers, which is usually a sign of a good work.

Benayoun: The statement is a bit disappointing, because I wonder why a gallery, what is its significant. On the other hand it's a sort of butterfly effect: something happening in Beijing will have an effect on the other side of the planet. For me, the work is like living cells that are separate from each other, and sometimes the magnet puts them together. For me it's the best work in the exhibition.

Chung: I would like this work more if it was not attached to the wall.

Ng: I find this work too calculated and thoughtful.

Benayoun: I agree that it is very professional, and ready for integration in the art market. The repetition of forms is something we see more and more in Asian art, especially with physical objects. At the same time, it works. I agree with your point, connecting Hong Kong and Beijing is a big symbol.

Tam: This work is complete in its idea and presentation. I like the idea that it is presented in uniformity, and when you look at each bowl, the bean is in a different position and you feel very subtle movements in each bowl. It builds up some kind of tension, and suddenly when the beans jumped up, it results in a very strong reaction, a sort of surprise and climax.

Benayoun: What you say is important, the point about expectations. We can take some other works in which this is not so obvious, and where there is a lot of expectation, but the final result I'm not so sure about. For example, **Black Moves**—I like the way it's animated, the soundtrack is well done. The tribal perspective and perception of space is pretty well done.

Ng: Why is it not in the animation category?

Fan: The entrant applied for this category. The most important difference is that animation category works will be seen in a theater, while this work is seen in a gallery.   We also have a lot of video art being entered in this category. For this artist, she also has different versions of the work in the application, like a domed version, 360 degree and other versions.

Huhtamo: I wonder why the artist did not make the approach larger, now it feels a bit like a window. I don't think combining that with the surround sound really compensate for the fact that the video is within a visible frame. It should be larger than our field of vision. But even as it is, the work is still effective. When you concentrate on the image, the 3D effect can be quite magical. The issue is that I don't find the work highly original. You see a lot of student work like that, especially if the student is interested in certain 3D software. This work is abstract and formalist in its approach. For me it's a nice work, but not installed in the most effective way. Technically it's well realized, and I can imagine that this artist, if she follows this line of work, can achieve something very interesting. The work is not yet on that level, it is on the level of promise rather than true achievement.

Tam: In the proposal, it's supposed to be a more environmentally immersive work, the person is meant to be embraced by the animation, so it's a completely different experience. I agree that the screen is now in an embarrassing size which does not work very well. I agree that the concept may not be very original, and that independent spirit should be one of the criteria for this competition.

Benayoun: The artist could have built a dome.

Tam: A dome does not make it any more independent.

Benayoun: To get an immersive effect, we could project from the ground to the ceiling, or take up the whole wall. In this way it takes up all of your field of vision, which gives a totally different effect.

Chung: I agree that this is a scaled down version of a more epic work, but I try to adjust my distance from the projection screen, and the closer I get the more powerful the effect. I am not sure whether she may adopt some sort of stereoscopic approach where the audience can wear something in order to block out other images, rather than in a gallery setting.

Benayoun: But you cannot wear a stereoscopic device on your head for a long time.

Huhtamo: She could do something with the use of motion in relation to the masses of elements you see. This is nothing original, it is something the artist Woody Vasulka was already exploring in the 1970s with his famous video works. He created 3D effects with different speeds of motion.

Benayoun: To be successful, the work has to create an ambiguity in space, in which there are many inversions of perspectives, where you first have a feeling that you are over it, and then under it. It happens not by going systematically through something, but by changing how the shapes are moving. If this artist could explore this capacity more deeply, of disturbing our perception of space, that's what at stake in this work, for me.

Ng: Did the artist request to install the work like this? Is she okay with the space and the scale?

Fan: Of course there is spatial limitation in the gallery, but as the competition organizer, we could not give her too much suggestion on how to install it, because you have to assess how she does it. But we had some mild suggestions for her, such as obtaining equipment support and also how to mask the area. We also assigned her a room that she requested.

Ng: I spent a lot of time sitting there. I agree that it is not a very new approach to animation, but after sitting there for a while, I found it a bit like a Chinese painting. I thought the sound was taking over the whole thing, I would suggest that the artist pays attention to the sound. While the images change, the sound is always the same. To take it above the level of a student work, she should pay more attention to what kind of message she's trying to deliver.

Huhtamo: *The Elusive* is a different work from any other because it has this flipbook approach. For me the most interesting element is when you look at the stop-motion that's happening within the flip-book animation, during the flipping process, part of what you see seems to be reversed and upside-down. What I find strange is that when it stops momentarily, it always stops in the upright position, so what kind of message is it sending? The artist is saying that understanding of humanity can happen through a

landscape, which may explain why the image always stops in the correct manner. The elusiveness is referred to by the installation's structure itself, so that when you look at it from the front, you can only see one of the devices in motion. I don't think it is fully resolved. If you move to the side, you can look at all these things from an oblique angle. The artist forces you to make choices with your viewing position, so that you are playing with the landscape while your own body is moving. The work has a lot of promise, but is not completely satisfactory. Two points: first, I'm not sure if this straight line –like presentation is the most successful form, and second, I don't think this flipping action does as much as it could do. It does not create enough dynamism between the stopping and the flipping movement. It's an interesting work that tries to talk about interesting and important issues, but it's not yet fully resolved.

Benayoun: The reverse image that you talk about, I think it's because you are taller, that you see the image that's over it before it arrives in the correct position.

Ng: This is like a flip board that you see at airports in the old days. It seems that the artist framed it too loosely, whether or not it's intentional.

Benayoun: There are two things: the device and the content. I saw this work at another venue two weeks ago for another exhibition. I also came across another work the week before using exactly the same technique, automatic flip-book, with butterflies. There the integration between content and device is amazing and it works. Here the problem you have is the content. I don't get the point. It's just something moving without motion to present. The stop frame should be a kind of climax and surprise, and should bring you another understanding of the motion. For me, the work is on the way to doing something interesting, but stops there.

Chung: I try to ask why the devices are the same height and the frame size is the same. Also the time that they start and stop is the same.

Tam: I think the artist is using the analogy of a tunnel that soldiers use to escape underground to say something. The photos are taken at borders and are related to the army and the history of Hong Kong. I agree that there is a disconnect between the presentation and images, and what he tried to bring with the flip-book is not very clear.

Benayoun: Imagine a microphone recording the sound of flipping pages, like a machine gun firing, that could be interesting. We expect some integration between the medium and the content.

Huhtamo: If the artist is trying to suggest a tunnel, then the frames should be of increasing size as you go further back. Right now it doesn't work because the frames are hidden behind each other.   The only way you can see it as a tunnel is by going to the side, which means that you are, in a way, outside the installation. For me, the work is not developed enough to be fully interesting.

In *Spring up II – Coexistence*, we have a work in which the sound resonates with mirrors, and takes environmental sound affecting the visuals around it. The problem I find with this work is the resonating reflections of little mirrors on the walls are kind of messy, and they don't seem to be changing much. For me the visual world around it is not super interesting. The other issue is that the installation itself makes quite a lot of noise, and it's difficult for me to understand how that noise the mechanism makes combine with the ambient noise that's supposed to happen here. It would be more interesting if the installation itself was more quiet to give audiences the chance to play with the visual work we see here. It's definitely a work that's fully realized, but I don't find the effect is highly successful.

Benayoun: I agree. I see no clue in the work anything related to the sound capture. It's impossible because of the noise it makes. The visual effect is not that interesting, and the motion is not surprising. If it was a perceptive machine that is sensitive to the environment, then it would be the starting point of something interesting. But this is not in the work, I just see something moving and making noise.

Tam: I think it would work better if the environment is dark. What I would call noise, not sound, is disturbing. If the work was presented better, I'd imagine it's like an animated machine, and the reflections of the mirror is like butterflies or insects flying in space. It's like the jelly fish room in Ocean Park, but here I don't see the idea executed effectively, it's just mirrors reflecting light. It does not give the sense of animated life. The noise upsets the poetic quality of the work.

Chung: The motor noise of the machine is defeating the purpose of the work, which is about the poetics of life and the ecology of co-existence. I could see little relations between my presence and the machine's reaction.

Huhtamo: *voice from the root, reclaiming* speaks about important issues, about language in relations to identity and the disappearance of identity. The choice of chairs is deliberate and represent the multiplicity of cultures and points of view. You are forced to make choices between those seats, which affects your identity. Also there is the aspect of the disappearing language. The thematic aspect of the work is quite interesting. It has many implications not only for Hong Kong, but also for China and the world. The only issue I have is that aside from the chairs, it is difficult for me, as a foreigner, to get into the work and follow the whole process. Another issue is the monitor, loud speakers and chairs plus the table and desk, the two parts of the work did not quite work together. I have an interest in the idea behind it, though. I didn't find the balance between the idea and the presentation quite perfect as an installation.

Tam: I like this work because it's local, but the down side of being local is that it speaks only to certain audience, but not an international audience. When I look at the work, I wonder how English-speaking people would understand it, because it is about colloquial Chinese dialects. The artist is trying to learn from his father the dialect that he speaks, and so it's not just a study of language but also the history of his family, his identity. But for a colloquial work, some of the idea would be lost in translation. The primitive nature

of the work and the use of all those chairs, which are just simple chairs you can find in any family, as opposed to business chairs that reminds you of certain authority. The chairs are very low and suggests humbling yourself to take a very informal lesson—he sets it up like a classroom. I do agree that the two parts of the installation don't work very well as a whole, but he is recording the whole conversation between him and his father in the booklet, while on the other side in the informal classroom, you hear the dialogue going on between the speakers. It's a low-tech work, but I like the primitiveness and also the human side of it.

Benayoun: On the one hand, we mentioned that **Ming Jing** is suited for the art world, while this work is exactly the opposite. Hakka culture is the primitive culture of Hong Kong. The presentation is appropriate to the topic: the TV set is a cheap old one, the chairs are the same. It's not just the good will behind the work, but also how it's structured. For example, the comparison of words, and even though I am not native, I understand what the process is. There is something missing, and might be related to light. Imagine something more intimate. This is not a work where there is a degradation between medium and content, to me they are totally appropriate. I don't understand why he doesn't use video.

Tam: I think he wants you to concentrate on the voice. Even though he uses Chinese words, it's an alliteration, it doesn't make sense at all, I can just pronounce the sounds that is similar to the dialect, so there is no difference between you and me.

Benayoun: Even a blurry video would be good. There is a difference between a good documentary and a good artwork. For me this work still lacks something.

Chung: I agree. I think what's missing is because he's talking about his father teaching him, it's a personal experience with his father, and that part is missing in the work. It's not necessary to show the father, but to give a hint of the intimate and specific relationship between himself and his father, that's important in this case. It's important to see something that reminds me that he's learning from his father, and how the relationship plays out through the learning process. Nowadays they are talking about the unification of dialects in Hong Kong and China, and phasing out Cantonese, so preserving dialects is a hot topic.

Huhtamo: With regards to **Rekion-crepitation**, I was told that this work exists as a kind of performance, and the supersonic wave sound recording is amazing. I'm not sure if the various elements are match each other perfectly well, and I also wonder how seeing the performance would change our perspective.

Fan: We invited the artist to do an opening act, but when he arrived, we discovered that the machine would either work on him or in the installation, but not both in this setting, and he decided that the exhibition part is more important.

Benayoun: It would be good to have the video presented next to the robot. We need the documentation to understand. To me it's totally fake, it would be magical if we can really get the sound from the body.

Ng: I don't think it's a good representation of the performance, which is more interesting than the robot itself.

Huhtamo: It's a pity, because there is more potential there.

About *SEMI-SENSELESS DRAWING MODULES Trilogy*, I didn't see the full thing. I saw the work at the ICC in Tokyo. I saw the portrait version. It was on two opposite walls, the portrait videos behind you, and the robots in front, and you are standing between the two. I'm not sure I understand the logic, in what sense are the robots taking something from the projected videos and turning them into some kind of drawing? The work is ambitious, but there are a lot of works with drawing robots around, so it is not very original. Also I don't understand what it's trying to do. The three elements make it less interesting for me, because it adds a sense of randomness. I understand it is trying to make a connection between humans and robots/cybernetic creatures, but I am not sure if it's totally original.

Benayoun: For me, there are different elements: tracking the hand with colors, migration between watching the video and drawing, and writing. It is interesting what people put in Artist Statement. When I read "Explore the meaning of human creativity", I say, "What is the meaning of human creativity? I have no idea!" Just because of that, I have to say no!

Chung: In the first round, I had high expectations of this work. Not only the sophistication of technology, but I expect that they invite some community to work with that machine in order to explore co-drawing between children and machine. What we see is simply recreating our drawing or writing on the notebook and with some randomness creating the marks on paper. When we chose this work as a finalist, we were expecting some sort of package with the community and a participatory approach with this work.

Fan: This work is a trilogy, and in the first part, they invited children to participate, but there is no participatory element in the proposal for this part.

Tam: I think when they provide the book for you to write about Hong Kong, that's the participatory element.

Benayoun: This shows how hard it is to be a media artist—it's difficult to do something that's not a demo, or haven't been done by many other people, and to create something coherent. This work is not very convincing.

Chung: With *iFerrum*, I saw the work in the graduation show, which had the real fluid. Here there is only the documentation, a collection of the equipment supporting the experiment, but not the real work shown to the audience.

Ng: When I look at works like this, I look at whether the result is interesting, and secondly whether the concept is meaningful. This work has a lot of possibilities in the future, but right now it stops at the first level and is not pushed forward the next.

Huhtamo: I have seen works in the past that use magnetic particles, there is a tradition of these kind of works. For me, using the magnetic process to draw those abstract paintings is the most interesting aspect, rather than just the manipulation of those fluids. I haven't seen other people doing that.

Benayoun: For me, it's very close to what you get with ink and stroke, so it's not surprising.

Huhtamo: I vote for *Ming Jing* for the main prize. For me it's the most outstanding work.

Benayoun: It's the most complete work.

Ng: It looks like a grand prize work.

Benayoun: Do we have any alternative?

Huhtamo: I like *voice from the root, reclaiming*. I think there's an honesty to the work and a balance between the low-tech form and the artist's relationship with his father.

Ng: I'm confused why this work is in the media art category. It's a simple video installation, with no interactivity and not much technology, so I am a little hesitant about it. It's a nice work, and the Hakka dialect is politically correct in the art world. "Innovative use of technology" part is a bit weak.

Huhtamo: The creativity and originality works, also feasibility for exhibition. I think it has independent spirit. What other nominations are there? *Rekion-crepitation* or *iFerrum*?

Chung: If you compare the two, I think *Rekion-crepitation* is more complete.

Huhtamo: We recognize the work is both a performance and an installation, and even though the performance is not shown here, the two create an interesting interplay and complement each other. But even judging from what we can see, the sound quality is extraordinary. It's amazing to hear the soundscape the system creates.

Benayoun: That's just a technical aspect, about the use of super-directivity of sound, and there are plenty of people working with that. The technology works, but the performance is weak. It uses the body more to synchronize the motion of the robot, rather than taking something from the body.

Huhtamo: What about *Black Moves*? We all found it nice, even though it's not very original, and it's not a perfect installation. Nobody has any strong objections against *Rekion-crepitation*, it's just that it's not presented right?

Benayoun: It's not presented as it should be. The original intention was something more immersive.

Tam: Would you consider not giving Silver?

Fan: It is possible. You just need to consider which is the best work to give the awards to. If you think nothing fits into that award, we can skip it. For Gold Award, the recipient gets $50,000 cash prize, software and trophy. Silver Award gets $30,000, and Special Mention gets no money and a certificate. For Best Local Work, the highest ranked finalist will get this award. That means if the Gold Award winner is from Hong Kong, he will get this also. We allow changes and suggestions with reasons. For example, you mentioned that *voice from the root, reclaiming* embodies independent spirit, in some ways, maybe this can be a new definition for Best Local Work.

Benayoun: For *Rekion-crepitation*, we find the sound disturbing because we are referring to the statement, which says it takes sound from around. If we forget the performance, it's a coherent work if we accept that the sound produced is my body in action. It's not a weak version of the performance, but something that is a statement in itself that is quite coherent. It is not designed to please the art field, but the community.

Chung: I consider it performance, but not by a human being.

Tam: One of the objectives of the competition is to nurture, and if we see an artist who's still missing something…

Fan: For your information, our original definition of the Best Local work is the highest ranking Hong Kong work, which should be the Gold Award winner, but you can also use this award to recognize other local works. However, you should explain it in your statement on stage at the awards ceremony.

Benayoun: Maybe we should give something to *The Elusive*. Can it be the Hong Kong prize?

Huhtamo: It cannot be called Best Local work…

Tam: I like the name Emerging Talent.

Media Arts Category

Gold Award
Ming Jing
Chan Kiu-hong / Hong Kong

Silver Award
Rekion-crepitation-
Katsuki Nogami / Japan

Special Mention
voice from the root, reclaiming
Yip Kai-chun / Hong Kong

Emerging Talent Award
The Elusive
Siu Wai-hang / Hong Kong