





LAM WONG: GHOSTS FROM UNDERGROUND LOVE

Curated by Steven Dragonn

September 10th to November 26th
Canton-sardine, Vancouver, BC

Lam Wong's new solo exhibition since spring 2020 features series of all young female portrait paintings that Wong has started working on during his Griffin Art Projects residency in summer 2019. His new works depict powerful emotions of bravery, passion, love, desire, fear and hope of young women concealed in the underground network of secret lover letters during their prison times under authoritarian surveillance, Institutional oppression and unjustified punishments.

Focusing on his concern of love and suffering, two fundamental conditions of human existence, Wong is again turning his attention to investigate the construct of emotion and trauma. Inspired by and based on Laura Nys' research on Emotion Refuge and love letters of juvenile delinquents during early 20th century in Europe. These are portraits of young lost ghosts, tortured by love, scarred and burned, undimmed by courage, forgotten... eternally immortalized now.



UNDERGROUND LOVE (ART WORK)

ARTS & CULTURE
EXHIBITION
2024

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Artist's Notes

Lam Wong

My art practice is mainly concerned with human suffering and finding spiritual solutions through contemporary art.

Ghost From Underground Love is an art exhibition that investigates the emotional impacts of intense surveillance and systematic oppression on the adolescent lives of young women across times and cultures. This project is based on my ongoing research and collaboration with Dr. Laura Nys on the notions of 'Emotional Refuge' and 'The History of Emotions'. My concerns are with how the social environment and personal desire shape our emotions, love and suffering.

As a visual artist and father of a visible minority transgender daughter, I have directly known the impacts of psychological torment undergoing a turbulence of emotions in dealing with love, desire, passion and bravery in relationships. My empathy and sense of powerlessness have propelled me to investigate adolescent emotional struggles, particularly in same-sex relationships. For this project, I study the emotional influences that impact the shaping of young people's lives in the context of research conducted by Laura Nys, currently assistant- professor at the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in South Korea, who has done extensive research into the role of emotions in the lives of young women in reformatory institutions in Belgium during the 1920s. My new work depicts the emotional traumas of these women and their desire for love and liberation under the authoritarian and religious institutional abuse of the time.

A century apart in time, the second part of my research and exhibition engages with the public perception of young girls from Hong Kong, the city I grew up in during my teenage years in the 1980s, with regard to their societal roles and identity shift from a 1980s pop influenced consumerism to the political activism of the democratic social movement in Hong Kong during 2019. Many casualties were young women on the front lines of resistance under the harsh sociopolitical climate.

The project involves portraits of these two groups of young women – the troubled institutionalized young girls from Belgium in early 20th

century and the raging, brave, politically-driven Hong Kong girls of the early 21st century. Though similar in age, the two groups come from different eras, continents, cultural conditions, religious and political backgrounds. During the research, I draw on comparisons between cultures (European vs Asian) and investigate the impacts of systematic oppression and modes of survival under the intense surveillance conditions in underground movements.

The exhibition is expressed with a new series of paintings depicting the emotional states of the young women. Artworks are produced to illustrate the historical and cultural backgrounds behind the two subjects. The new works aim to capture and tell the stories of the women's personal sacrifices in response to the history of oppression. I aim to display the young women's passion and bravery as well as their struggles and the emotional chaos shaped by their social environments.



Emotion, Gender and Power

Emotional norms and expressions in the Bruges State Reformatory for delinquent girls (1927-1941)

Laura Nys

The State Reformatory of Bruges, founded in 1927, was a disciplinary wing aimed at re-educating delinquent girls. The detainees' personal case files offer a wide range of ego-documents, including so-called *billets clandestins*: letters secretly exchanged among the detained girls. These clandestine notes contain frequent and intense emotional expressions, strongly contrasting with the self-control displayed by the girls when addressing the institutional staff. This article seeks to explain the prominent presence of emotions in the girls' clandestine discourse.

On the 27th of January 1940, sixteen-year-old Yvette got caught reading a clandestine note that had been secretly transmitted by her friend Marie. 'Oh Gette, I wish you could leave, and me too...', Marie wrote. She was fed up with her confinement in this 'devilish' house and wanted to get out. 'But the Principal, my torturer, doesn't allow me to, he does not see that I cannot bear it any longer, that I suffer tremendously...'

The *Établissement d'Éducation de l'État pour filles difficiles et indisciplinées* [State Reformatory for recalcitrant or difficult girls, hereafter: State Reformatory] in Bruges, where Marie and Yvette were detained, was a disciplinary wing founded in 1927 under the auspices of pedagogue and psychologist Jean van de Vliedt. The staff was recruited from the Sisters of the Holy Family of Kortrijk. Like other state reformatories in Belgium, the state reformatory of Bruges accommodated girls that had been convicted for misconduct, vagrancy or indecency, but Bruges was specialised in girls that had been expelled from other institution because of their 'incorrigible' behavior. Out of fear that these girls would corrupt other detainees with their alleged violent or immoral behavior, they were transferred to the disciplinary wing of Bruges. Most of the girls originated from working class families in densely populated or industrial regions such as Brussels, Charleroi or Liège. At their arrival in

Bruges, 65 percent of them was between 17 and 19 years old. The majority would spend less than two years in Bruges, to be transferred to another institution, placed in employment, or allowed provisional freedom.

Bruges was only one of the many public and private reformatories where minors were sent to as a result of a measure of the Children's Court. Since the middle of the nineteenth century there had been separate penitentiary institutions for minors. But whereas in the nineteenth century the Classical Penal Law focused on punishing dangerous children, the Child Protection Act (1912), according to the legal doctrine of Social Defense, aimed to 'protect' children from a dangerous environment, as such preventing 'children in danger' from transforming into 'dangerous children'.

The Belgian historiography provides a whole array of recent and excellent publications, highlighting different aspects of juvenile delinquency. A less explored field however is the personal experience of juvenal delinquents themselves. A useful source for this is a note such as Marie's, which is but one of the hundred and fifty notes which were intercepted as 'billets clandestins' and were kept in the personal files of the girls in the State Reformatory of Bruges. The notes contain a diverse range of topics: Marie and Berthe exchanged addresses to keep in touch after their release, Elisabeth wrote passionate love letters to 'Bebette' and Gabrielle and Nelly invented an audacious escape plan on the back of sixteen worn-out playing cards.

However, most striking in these secret notes is the presence of intense emotions. 'My dear little Bebette', Elisabeth wrote. 'You know that my love is a fire and my passion is very strong. I want to hold you against my heart and make love to you and I am waiting impatiently for one of your fiery kisses'. Even though same-sex relationships in penitentiary institutions are not exceptional, the intensity of the emotional discourse in the notes is remarkable – not only when writing about love, but also about suffering, anxiety and desires. Secondly, there is a big discrepancy between the strong emotional discourse in the hidden letters, and the rather controlled emotional expression in letters addressing the head of the institution.

In this article I argue that the intense emotional discourse should be considered in the context of the rigid behavioral norms proclaimed by the State Reformatory, subjecting the detainees' emotional expressions to strict rules. After clarifying briefly the methodology and sources, I discuss the emotional norms proclaimed by the State Reformatory, to contrast them with the girls' clandestine discourse.

The emotional regime of the State Reformatory

Equanimous housewives

The norms and values proclaimed by the state reformatory in Bruges corresponded to the bourgeois ideal of domesticity. The girls were to become decent mothers and spouses, suited for the dominant breadwinner model. Hence, the emotional norms within the state reformatory were strongly gender- and class related. Although the period under study is the interwar period, the reformatory shows remarkable similarities with the nineteenth century Victorian emotional norms. These were strongly embedded in the biological complementary thinking about the sexes. Within this framework, women were considered to have limited reasoning capacities and were rather oriented at intuitive, practical and detailed tasks. This made the (white, middle class) woman very well suited for domestic duties and child rearing, in particular because she had a 'natural' loving and caring temper. Men on the other side – still in the Victorian line of thought –, had a greater capacity for objectivity and abstraction and were better capable of judging impartially – qualities that were indispensable for tasks in the public sphere.

In her detailed study about the reformatory of Bruges, Veerle Massin observed that qualities such as diligence, sensibility and attempts to restrain from immoral behavior were highly valued by the institution – characteristics that fit well in the criteria for the perfect Victorian housewife. Negative observations referred to a broad array of qualities: indiscipline, short-temper, nonchalance, idleness, pride, jealousy, dishonesty and indifference. Here too, the correspondence with the ideal of the stable-tempered, caring housewife and mother of the Victorian period is striking.

Self-control

Furthermore, the girls were ought to balance between expressing the appropriate emotion and the appropriate intensity of this emotion. Loss of self-control was punished, as Gabrielle experienced when expressing her anger after a negative evaluation. At the same time, the register also reveals the sanctioning of Thérèse, punished for showing 'stubborn indifference' after a negative evaluation. While the former was punished for expressing an emotion, the latter was punished for not showing the appropriate emotion (i.e. remorse). While a certain degree of arbitrariness on the side of the institutional staff cannot be excluded, these sanctions are illustrative of the extremely fine-grained rules concerning emotional expressions, wherein the notion of self-control was of crucial importance.

Generally speaking, the concept of self-control was subject to change in the interwar period as a consequence of the growing informalisation in interpersonal communication. During the Victorian era, formal rules acted as a structural barrier against temptation. In the twentieth century however, it was rather the individual personality that should deal with excessive emotions, leading to new categories of virtue in which self-control was the key notion. In this respect, the emotional norms of the State Reformatory corresponded to the increasing importance of self-control in the wider societal norms of the interwar period. With regard to explanatory models however, the institution still referred to older theories.

Perverse sexuality

According to Jean van de Vliedt, the head of the institution, a problematic sexual instinct, a supposed homosexuality and general disobedience were all interconnected. In the course of the nineteenth century, thinking about sexuality became increasingly embedded in medical and psychological discourse, being considered as more than just an physical phenomenon. Sexuality was considered as a complex of psychological traits, in which an excess or shortage impacted the personality – and especially the feminine personality.

This view on sexuality had an impact on the notion of self-control. The institutional discourse suggests that aggression was sanctioned when it manifested itself, but sexuality and the 'erotic instinct' were repressed even *before* the girls showed any outward manifestations. This subtle difference is not so much visible in the punishment register, but is observable in the semi-annual evaluation forms. On Marie's form for instance, Jean van de Vliedt wrote that her work efforts were adequate, but that she continuously gave in to 'vicious dreams' that had a negative impact on her behavior. Thus, in spite of the *external* good behavior, Marie should improve on wiping out her *thinking* about immoral deeds, as the internal 'instinct' had a negative influence on the *external* behavior. As such, the girls were to be in complete self-control both on their behavior and on their internal experiences.

In the behavioral reports and the disciplinary register, girls were regularly described as being in crisis. This notion of crisis was a flexible term: there was the 'crisis of madness', the 'crisis of stubbornness' and the 'erotic crisis'. About Marie for instance was noted: 'Real *erotic* crisis, has repeatedly embraced L. Laurence in public in a disgraceful manner. They are two obstinate, immoral girlfriends.'

Judging from the semi-annual reports and the punishment register, the erotic crises were considered to be a strong impulse of erotic feelings or a moment of fierce rage when the love relationships were prevented by institutional measures. Jean van de Vliedt wrote about Yvonne that when she could not satisfy her 'lascivious tendencies', she would slip into an 'erotic crisis that made her a real fury'. The only solution then were therapeutic bandages or the straitjacket.

This discourse about the girls or women whose behavior was purportedly dominated by their sexuality and who were not able to control themselves, has important consequences with regard to power relations. As historical psychologist Stephanie Shields states: 'constructions of emotion out-of-control are used to disempower people'. Brushing aside and labelling the girls' anger as 'hysterical' or 'erotically hysterical' implies that their anger was not caused by the institutional circumstances, but by their own uncontrollable temper. Labelling an emotion as irrational and uncontrolled crises distracts the attention from the causes of these emotional expressions. At the same time, this construction of irrationality produces a legitimation of a repressive attitude towards the girls. The labelling of a detained girl 'in crisis' or 'hysterical, erotic individual' then can be seen as a component of a discourse that served to legitimize the institutional hierarchy.

Emotional Refuge

The girls' clandestine discourse stood in strong contrast with the norms promulgated by the state reformatory: sensibility, a stable temper, zeal, respect and above all: a rigid self-control, both with regard to anger and affection. The clandestine discourse constructed by the girls was exactly the opposite: their love was active, fierce; it was curious about and keen on bodily affection. This contrasted with the gender-related emotional norms with respect to love, depicting female sexuality as the passive, dutiful and loving nature of the spouse. Lastly, some of the letters promulgated a same-sex love, whereas the dominant discourse endorsed a heterosexual love.

These same-sex relationships gave rise to fierce debates among the girls. A lot of the girls urged each other to avoid the relationships, fearing the harsh sanctions. Others were concerned about their future and their reputation: 'Marie, do as I do, love a man but not a girl', Rosalie wrote. 'Me nor you, we will never marry a girl anyway (...). The people will think we have gone mad'. Others, like Josée did not see the problem: 'One day you asked me why can't we love a girl just like a man', she wrote to Marie, 'But of course, it is totally possible! After all, I love a young girl instead of

a young man and it's the same love like when I loved a man'.

Secondly, the emotional expressions were characterized by a great intensity. The girls tried to convince each other that they were totally immersing themselves in their feelings of love – or the other way around: that it was their love dominating them. 'I love you like crazy!', Marie wrote. 'I allow the love to control me, even in my hand writing'. The girls searched for words that would be powerful enough to express their feelings. 'To say that I love you, my dearest, is not enough because it is a real adoration that I feel for you, oh yes I adore you!' Josephine wrote, therein placing 'adoring' one step higher than 'loving'. Using strong words, interjections like 'oh' and repetitions ('oh my dear I love you!! I love you! I love you!') the girls tried to express their love with words. Sometimes this was also expressed using bodily terms: 'I want to give my whole heart to you, and only to you,' Yvette wrote to Marie, adding that she wanted to talk 'from eye to eye, from heart to heart, to hug you'. Indeed, this discourse was connected to bodily practices such as kissing, tattooing a lovers' name in the arm or exchanging hair strands as a token of their love. These immersions in emotion stood in stark contrast with the ideal of a perfect self-control, as required by the emotional regime.

Yet, the notion of self-control was not entirely absent from the clandestine notes. When Yvette confided Marie her fears that their love relation would be discovered, Marie gave her some advice: 'I am sure that you tremble when you hear them [the institutional staff]. But *control yourself*, my little wolf, and *make your eyes lie!*' Marie's interpretation of self-control then was exactly the opposite of the institutional interpretation. To this latter, self-control implied the *convergence* of external and internal behavior. To Marie, 'control yourself' implied the *divergence* of external behavior and internal experience, convincing Yvette to 'lie with her eyes' and thus expressing another feeling than she was experiencing. Herein, Marie not only shows that she was well aware of the institutional emotional norms, but she also shows her capability to balance between the public and hidden transcripts.

Balancing between hidden and public transcript

Whereas the girls used the billets clandestins often as an opportunity to express emotions, letters to the Principal were rather an occasion to write about their emotions. The girls wrote in a more detached way and chose their wordings in a deliberate manner. Jeanne for instance wrote 'Every single day, yes every day I react blindly and sometimes in spite of myself, to the passion that makes me not only sick but also a slave of myself'. Her writing is dominated by her agitated tone (the repeating of 'every day'), yet on the other side she also analyses herself from a distance. She

acknowledges her uncontrollable passion, but describes her passion and herself as if it were two separate entities ('the passion... that makes me sick').

In acknowledging that she was possessed by her 'passion' that dominated her actions, Jeanne seemed to adhere to the institutional discourse and Jean van de Vliedt's views on sexuality, as discussed earlier. Indeed, one of her biannual reports states that she was 'ruled by an alarming conflict between her youthful mentality; daring, childlike, the cynicism, the vanity of evil, and the sexual tyrannical tumult which suffocates all her appropriate potential'. In other words, the report distinguished between her overall mentality and the passionate 'tyrannical' sexuality that ruined her capacities. The similarity in Jeanne's discourse and the institutional discourse is striking.

In her letter to the inspector of the Office de Protection d'Enfants, (another) Jeanne repeatedly emphasized her growing ability of self-control, indicating that she was well aware of the importance of self-control for the institution: 'I still have moments when it is very difficult... but I restrain myself, and I tell myself: it will pass, and then I'm calm again and in this way, step by step, I'll overcome myself'. This suggests that Jeanne was familiar with the emotional norms and the criteria of 'appropriate' behavior. However, Jeanne's letter to the inspector could not contrast more with the intense feelings of her passionate love letters, written in the hidden realm.

This large discrepancy in discourse expressed towards the authorities and among themselves, suggests more than just a difference in register. It reveals the capacity of (some of the) girls to unravel the rules of the public transcript and apply them when necessary. Whereas the line between the public and the hidden realm was clear-cut in the examples given above, this distinction was disrupted by a phenomenon that the girls called 'faire son train' ('doing one's train').

Openly contesting the norms: 'faire son train'

On the 15th of December 1931 the punishment register reported: 'Clara had to stay in her cell due to her great rudeness towards Mr. Director General W.; at around noon *she started her train* as they call it: singing and making noise. We were forced to give her a shower. Yvonne the same. Around 7 in the evening 1st Mireille, 2nd Jeanne D. 3rd Jeanne R. and 4th Berthe *started doing their train*, singing and yelling. [Mireille] who was the leader of all of this, broke all of her windows. The only reason for this is that Clara was punished'. The notion '*doing her train*' is mentioned

sixteen times in the punishment register, and involved yelling and screeching, often from their rooms or the disciplinary cell – sometimes collectively as an expression of solidarity towards the other detainees. The phenomenon is intriguing because it clusters a lot of elements: a mocking discourse was accompanied by bodily practices, it could be individual or collective, could be planned deliberately or happen spontaneously, and it united feelings of frustration with solidarity.

As the citation shows, the practice could be triggered by a feeling of injustice and anger because of a punishment on individual level, but at the same time it also attests of cohesion and solidarity between certain cliques – a solidarity that was usually expressed in the hidden sphere, and was meant to stay hidden. The practice of doing her train pulled this solidarity out of the hidden sphere to openly contest the authorities.

Often, this practice went together with provocative behaviour. By singing loudly and yelling, the girls openly defied the emotions which would be considered socially apt: equanimity and a high level of awe. Sometimes the phenomenon was even accompanied by aggressive behavior. This could be aimed at physical objects, like Mireille who smashed her windows, but also against the staff. Yelling and screeching already contrasted with the girls' gender roles, but showing aggressive behaviour was at complete odds with the norms.

The punishment register creates an image of the girls' uncontrollable rage. But this picture of 'emotions-out-of-control' can be nuanced when reading an intercepted conversation between Marie and Berthe. In their letter they not only debated which songs to sing, but they also settled a starting time of their action: '[Berthe] copy your songs for me quickly because you know one minute is enough to put me inside [in the disciplinary cell] and within the next two hours I will start my train, you will see. Here are the songs I will sing when I do my train.' Attached to the letter was a list of almost twenty songs, including occasional comments: 'nr.6 Moulin Rouge – very beautiful, you know'. It explains the many billets clandestins containing song texts.

The songs often had story lines figuring gorgeous women and their lovers in bars, but there was one peculiar song in circulation that seems to be written by the girls themselves, openly mocking the institution. This provocative song was the very first one on Berthe's and Marie's list. The first paragraph was rather pessimistic and described the long period of confinement, the harsh life in the State Reformatory and the sanctions. The second paragraph was provocative, stressed the cohesion

between the girls and demonstrated their own agency. Indeed, when their confinement became unbearable, the song suggested: 'oh well, let's do our train!'

Conclusion

The personal case files of girls detained in the State Reformatory of Bruges contain fascinating clandestine notes, in which the girls expressed intense emotional expressions. These expressions stood in strong contrast with the institutional norms proclaimed by the State Reformatory. The strict behavioural norms proclaimed by the institution included norms regulating the girls' emotional expressions, in which self-control was of crucial importance. The clandestine discourse of the detained girls, in contrast, completely subverted the institution's emotional norms: equanimity became a dance between love, suffering and jealousy, the respect that the girls were ought to show, became mockery, and the supposed self-control was transformed into a total immersion in extreme emotions. As such, the correspondence community functioned as an emotional refuge, allowing the girls to build a dam against the norms inflicted on them by the emotional regime.

Starting from the letters written by minors themselves, this view from below brings to light a new element in the historiography about juvenile delinquency: the role of emotions in a penitentiary context. An element that was of high importance for the detainees themselves, as illustrated by the prominent place of emotions in the clandestine discourse. Some of the girls even considered their feelings as the one part of the self where the institution could not reach them: among Marie's scribblings on the wrinkly shreds of paper cited at the opening of this article, she had added: 'I hate all my tormenters. They took everything from me: freedom, family, joy. But what they cannot take from me is my heart, my imagination... No, they will never prevent me to love'.

*This article extracts was originally published in Dutch in the Dutch-Belgian journal *Historica*, 2016, nr. 1, pp. 17-22. The complete article is found on the webpage: <https://canton-sardine.com/2022/08/23/ghosts-from-underground-love/>*

Nowhere To Place A Soul

Steven Dragonn

Lam Wong has been channelling his emotions, especially concerning love and suffering, into his art practice for a while. On one hand, this may have been influenced by artist Mark Rothko (1903-1970) who frequently informs Wong's spiritual art practice. Rothko committed suicide after he had finished his last dark painting *Untitled (Black on Grey)*. It may also come from Wong's interest and study of Buddhism. On the other hand, I clearly see that he tries to distill the dark energies through the act of painting, which is not only an art practice, but also a meditation for him. Like his earlier paintings, such as *Mother* (2011), *Untitled (Homage to Turner)* (2011), *CD 318 (Re-Performance)* (2013), *Israel* (2013), *Spider and I* (2014), we can easily identify many complex, subtle yet powerful emotions from the artist. In his previous solo exhibition *Lam Wong: Mind Transition* at Canton-sardine in 2018, his painting *The Suffering* (2017), could be considered as a concentrated element developed and distilled by his 'mind transition' due to a life-changing event in his family – the tragedy of losing someone we most love. Then this element expanded into a wider range of his practice, not just in painting but also in other media such as photography, installation and performance, eventually expressed through the way of Zen, which tends to be read as an eastern philosophical mindset, simultaneously with his diasporic identity being emphasized by the western gaze of so-called multiculturalism in Canada. Regardless of the social condition, his emotions can be investigated once you peel off the cultural identity surface; the charcoal and the mirror, used in many of his works are symbolic, charcoal being impermanence and the mirror being the ground of our mind.

2019 was a critical year that affected Wong's mind along with his art practice. With the intense flow of information and political upheavals coming from Hong Kong, where Wong grew up, his emotions became darker and stronger, which can be detected later in his solo exhibition at Centre A – *Lam Wong: the world is as soft as a volcano: a moving composition* (2020). A good example is *Self-Portrait as Volcano* (2020), a prophetic sculptural installation made with cedar mulch, charcoal, and a plaster face of the artist sitting on top of the ready to erupt black mountain. Covid and the global pandemic hit the moment the show ended.

Fear shadowed the globe and an ever-fragile social justice was fuelled by the plague of anger and new threats.

The main series in the project *Ghosts From Underground Love* coincides with this critical moment. Even though the collaboration of the artist with Dr. Laura Nys was initiated as early as 2017, and the artworks are mostly a re-imagination of the historical archives based on research conducted by Nys, the importance of the moment when these images were produced should not be overlooked, especially the context of the emotions experienced and felt by both the artist and the world. Alongside the series of paintings of the girls from the Belgian state reformatory, this exhibition also features a mini-series of young girls from Hong Kong, portraits depicting the cultural transition of female identity under the social political suppression of the revolutionary uprising of 2019. The portraits are depictions of the artist's concerns with emotional suffering through his meditative reproductions of these women. The two series at first glance may seem unrelated, but the power of the artist's emotions evokes a deeper level of the thinking process and of cultural and emotional exchange – a kind of cross-culture universal solidarity.

We may wonder: what drives Wong to describe such dark emotions through his artwork? His notion of painting as a meditation to express strong feelings may be one reason. But beyond that, I believe that powerful emotions may come from a resistance, not only by the artist himself, but also from those around the world. As Laura Nys described in the conclusion of her essay *Emotion, Gender and Power* (2016):

The strict behavioural norms proclaimed by the institution included norms regulating the girls' emotional expressions, in which self-control was of crucial importance. The clandestine discourse of the detained girls, in contrast, completely subverted the institution's emotional norms: equanimity became a dance between love, suffering and jealousy, the respect that the girls were shown, became mockery, and the supposed self-control was transformed into a total immersion in extreme emotions. As such, the correspondence community functioned as an emotional refuge, allowing the girls to build a dam against the norms inflicted on them by the emotional regime.

This reminds me of another famous quote from Michel Foucault:

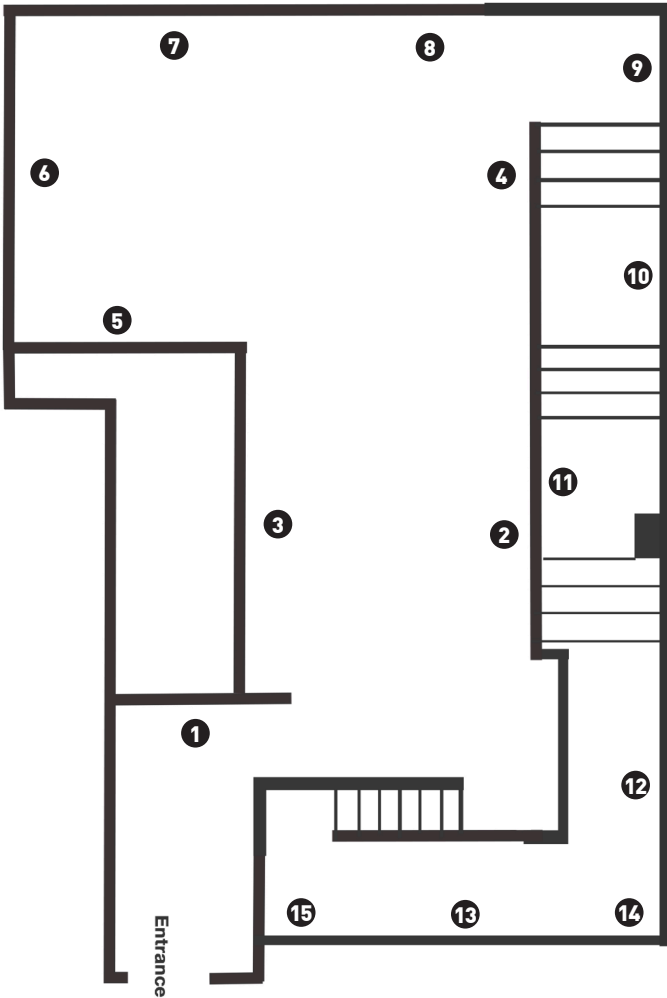
*Where there is power, there is resistance — Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*.*



The secret love letters written by the girls in the Belgian reformatory and reproduced and reimagined in Wong’s exhibition then act as a form of resistance against the norms and emotional regimes of prison. The imaginary reproductions in Wong’s portraiture also signal the resistance against authoritarian suppression. The expression of dark and powerful emotions is not only the artist’s meditation, but also a resistance against the cruel oppressed reality and erosion of freedom of speech. Lam Wong tries to remind the viewers of how a personal and hidden emotion may turn into a force of liberation through art—we share emotions and learn from empathy. As a father of a transgender daughter, whom the exhibition is dedicated to, Wong examines and questions his own vulnerability towards the suffering of others. By giving a space of refuge for these brave, powerful feminist emotions and passions, Wong finds some sense of relief through this compassionate gesture.

LIST OF ARTWORKS

- 1 Study For Underground Love, 2022**
Chinese ink, oil and house paint on canvas panel
10.75 x 9 in, framed size 17 x 15 in
 - 2 BELGIAN GIRLS (Part 1)**
Marie, 2019/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
Germaine, 2020/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
Elizabeth, 2020/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
Simone, 2019/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
Jeanne, 2019/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
Désiré, 2020/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
 - 3 Billets Clandestins, 2022**
Mixed media installation
Dimensions variable
Assisted by Mei Wong, Giulia Cecchi, Jade Chow and Steven Dragonn
 - 4 No, They Will Never Prevent Me To Love... (Solitary Confinement), 2022**
Lightbox, archival Fujitrans transparency with acrylic face-mount in wood frame
Framed size: 21.5 x 17.5 in
 - 5 Passion, 2020/2022**
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
12 x 9 x 1.5 in
 - 6 The Lacemaker III (1977), 2022**
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
36 x 60 in
 - 7 BELGIAN GIRLS (Part 2)**
Fernande, 2020/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
Felix, 2019/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
Huguette, 2020/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
Yvonne, 2020/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
 - 8 Causeway Bay (HK Girls), 2022**
Acrylic with pin-holes, archival pigment print on cotton rag watercolour paper
Diptych: 26 x 20 in each
 - 9 Insights From the History of Emotions (State Reformatory), 2022**
Video, 17minutes looped, colour, no sound
Assisted by Dr. Laura Nys and Steven Dragonn. Images courtesy of the Belgian State Archives of Bruges (M24: RK/ROG Brugge) and of the Flemish Agency Opgroeien (Growing Up).
- ## HONK KONG GIRLS
- 10 Bela (How do you sleep at night?), 2022**
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each
 - 11 Miss S (Get your dirty hands off me!), 2022**
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each



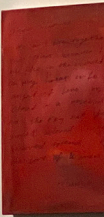
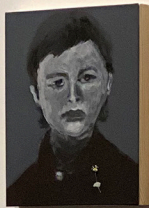
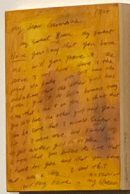
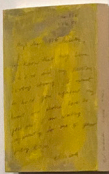
12 Agnes (Japanese Laundry), 2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas
mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each

13 Christy (Undisturbed Nigh Waves), 2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas
mounted on cradled wood panel
Diptych: 12 x 9 x 1.5 in each

14 Demon, 2019/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas
mounted on cradled wood panel
12 x 9 x 1.5 in

15 Desire, 2020/2022
Chinese ink, acrylic and oil on canvas mounted
on cradled wood panel
12 x 9 x 1.5 in

16 Underground Love, 2022
Chinese ink, oil and house paint on concrete wall
(Situated at LG lobby right beside the elevators)
200 x 240 in
*Assisted by Sean Cao, Botosan Omatsola,
Kiyoshi Whitley, Shawn Yan, Rola Yao and Viah
Yuan. Commissioned by 221A and BCA (B.C.
Artscape).*



Lam Wong is a visual artist and curator who immigrated from Hong Kong to Canada during the 1980s and studied design, art history and painting in Alberta and British Columbia. Wong works with painting, installation and performance to engage with themes such as the perception of reality, the role of art and the relationship between time, memory and space. He sees artmaking as an ongoing spiritual practice and his work draws upon his knowledge of Western art history and his interest in Taoism and Buddhism. Wong's creative approach is often concerned with blending Eastern philosophies and challenging the notion of painting.

Lam Wong has been based in Vancouver since 1998. He has recently exhibited his work and performed at Campbell River Art Gallery, Canton-Sardine, Centre A, Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden, Griffin Art Projects, Unit 17 and Vancouver Art Gallery.

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CANTON-SARDINE