

## Samson Young's Basel Piece Coined Top Ten by Foreign Media Hong Kong's Vietnamese Refugee Episode as Mirror for Europe

2016/6/21 — 18:26

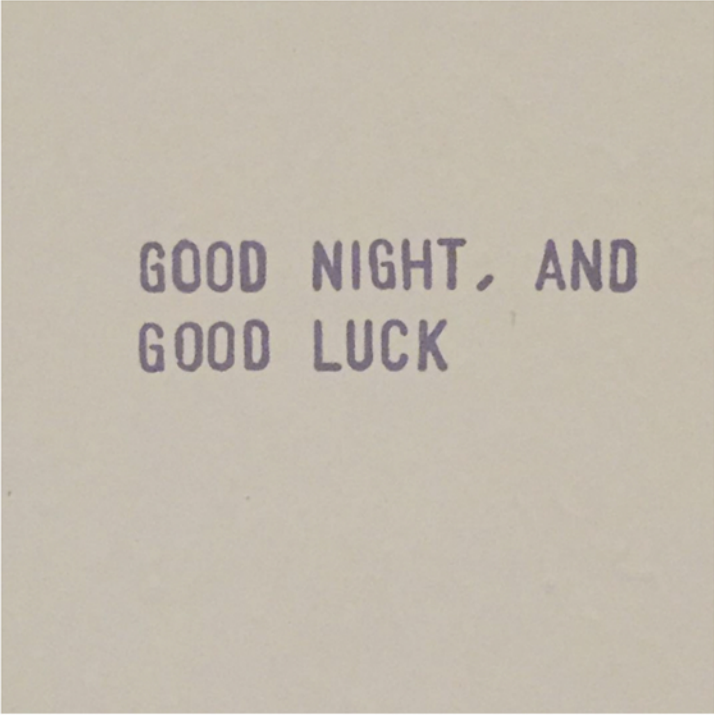
Between white booths at the art fair, a hydraulic platform - usually employed for cleaning work - is elevated. On it stood a man dressed in green law enforcement uniform. He isn't a policeman, however, but Hong Kong sound artist Samson Young.

This year, Samson participated in Switzerland's Art Basel with his work *Canon*, garnering him a vast amount of foreign press. It was one of ten unmissable works selected by artnet, and received compliments from UK's The Guardian. In his interview with The Stand, Samson notes that although the issue of human migration lies at the heart of his creative concern, the content of this piece is not limited to the particular refugee experience it denotes. Under the oeuvre of Europe's own on-going crisis, he thinks that Hong Kong - having handled its own episode with Vietnamese refugees - has an important voice in this conversation.

As a sound artist, Samson is especially alert to the various sounds and frequencies of the city. One note that resonates particularly with Samson happens to be the recent and frequent employment of the Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD), nicknamed soundwave canon, by the Hong Kong police. This device is capable of producing sound volume to great that would result in perpetual hearing damage. Its common use regards pest control of birds at airports. Today, its use against protestors has gradually become normalized.

Birds and protestors share the similar status of being unwelcomed. Tracing this notion, Samson arrives at the issue of human migration, and in particular that which took place in the 1980s regarding Vietnamese migrants to Hong Kong. He was born in 1979, the year "Skyluck" docked at the shores of Hong Kong, carrying onboard 3,000 escapers of Vietnamese communism. Samson searched for a newspaper published on the day he was born, and serendipitously encountered an article denoting Hong Kong's then new title as the "Number one port of refuge", upon which the story of Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong unfolded.

Samson remembers the occasional Vietnameseradio broadcast from his childhood. Although he could not comprehend its content, he and his classmates enjoyed emulating its syllables. It was not until much later that he recognized the broadcast's function as verbal deterrance of refugees. He recalls the time when his father crossed borders from Mainland illegally at the age of 11 - was that not a similar experience?



GOOD NIGHT, AND  
GOOD LUCK



To Samson, the refugee crisis as historical event implies greater and broader questions of empathy, borders and fear of the unknown. Heated discussions of this realm were recently reignited within Hong Kong's political sphere, concerning specifically the continuous influx of South East Asian refugees. Politicians even suggested the building of camps. Samson laments, "Unrecognition and unfamiliarity breeds fear, and the designation of 'us' and 'them'."

The words Good night, and good luck in *Canon* are printed on a blank wall. Superficially, it is read as blessings to the refugee community. The phrase is, however, appropriated from a 2005 American historical drama of the same title. It illustrates the American McCarthy era, and the ways in which communist members were hounded like witches. A particular quote from the film left a great impression on Samson's mind - "*We proclaim ourselves as indeed we are, the defenders of freedom wherever it continues to exist in the world. But we cannot defend freedom abroad by deserting it at home.*"

"This prompts me to think of Hong Kong today. While we uphold the principles of democracy, we simultaneously discriminate against migrants, domestic helpers, people of different color. This is a fundamental contradiction in logic."

For Basel, Samson put on a set of Hong Kong police uniform from colonial times, and broadcasted bird chirps through the LRAD on the elevated platform where he stood, occasionally intervening with a live reading of refugee deterring passages as heard over the radio years before. Using 3D printing technology, he reenacted the classic multipurpose red plastic bucket used by Vietnamese refugees back in the period, which was used to cleanse and to dine. The bucket is filled with clear water, and within it a small speaker is placed, relaying sounds of Samson and his LRAD.

"It is a very complicated piece." Samson produced a small booklet to be distributed at the fair for those who are not versed in Hong Kong's history, allowing them a better comprehension the piece. With regards to Europe's situation with Syrian refugees, Samson thinks that Hong Kong's episode can serve as good reference. "Hong Kong's unique voice becomes very important in the international discussion of refugees, as we are speaking from experience that traces two decades of history."