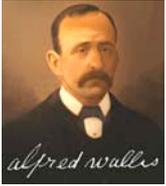


Two 'Primitive' Artist Icons: Poles Apart

Both artists spent many years of creating their own genre and are now enduring icons.

Who were they? **Alfred Wallis** (1855-1942) & **Tsang Tsou-choi** (1920-2007)

The term 'primitive' or 'naive' art is created by untrained artists. The definition of primitivism has several different meanings or interpretations. It may appear different to an anthropologist or an artist. The work is characterized by simplicity and a lack of the elements or qualities found in the art of formally trained artists. Early Indian Pueblo cave wall drawings or Australian aboriginal works could be said to be 'primitive' works.



Wallis's parents, Charles and Jane Wallis were from Penzance in Cornwall and moved to Devonport, Devon to find work in 1850. Alfred and his brother Charles were born in poverty. Shortly after this the children's mother died and this prompted the family to move back to Penzance. On leaving school Alfred became an apprentice basket maker before becoming a mariner in the merchant service by the early 1870s. This work involved sailing schooners across the North Atlantic between Penzance and Newfoundland.



Alfred married Susan Ward at St. Mary's church (left) Penzance in 1876, when he was 20 and his wife was 41 and became step-father to her five children. He continued his life as a deep-sea fisherman on the Newfoundland run in the early days of his marriage allowing him to earn a working wage until the death of his two infant children when Alfred switched to fish locally and labouring in Penzance.

The family moved to St. Ives, Cornwall in 1890 (right) where he established himself as a 'rag and bone man', buying scrap iron, sails, rope and other items. His business, "Wallis, Alfred, Marine Stores Dealer" closed for business in 1912. Alfred kept himself busy with odd jobs and worked for a local antiques dealer.



Following his wife's death in 1922, Wallis took up painting. Whether for boredom, 'comfort' or innate creative spirit within and collective memories of life at sea we cannot be sure.

What i do mosley is what use to Bee
out of my own memory what we may
never see again as thing are altered
all to gether Ther is nothin what ever
do not look like what it was sence i can
Remember .

alfred wallis



Wallis's poverty prompted him to work on whatever materials that came to hand, including driftwood and old bits of cardboard.

Wallis was completely lacking in formal training meant that his vision remained fresh intuitively and untainted by traditional academic trappings and preconceptions of draughtsmanship and perspective.



His subjects focused on the town of St. Ives but most notably on the sea. His renderings of ships, painted in an elegantly modernist style, are sufficiently accurate in their detail.



His paintings are considered an excellent example of naïve art; perspective is ignored and an object's scale is often based on its relative importance in the scene. This gives many of his paintings a map-like quality. Wallis painted his seascapes from memory, in large part because the world of sail he knew was being replaced by steamships. Lacking money, Wallis improvised with materials, mostly painting on cardboard ripped from packing boxes.

Below left is Wallis view of St. Ives island. (See right a photo of modern St. Ives island)



Below again left are paintings of schooners and right a painting by a skilled trained marine artist.





Wallis was thought to be one of the influential 'primitive' painters. Wallis' work had a tremendous impact on the renowned English artists like Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood. They happened to come upon Wallis painting one day, in his small cottage at 3 Back Road West St.Ives. They instantly became admirers and staunch advocates of his uninhibited expression.



His view of St Ives harbour on the Cornish coast can be seen in the National Maritime Museum, London, for example. It was painted on the side of a cardboard box.

Despite his artistic influence and admirers, Wallis's work did not capture the public's imagination during his lifetime. He died in poverty in Madron Workhouse for vagrants, chronic sick, elderly and unmarried mothers near Penzance He continued painting and visited by the St.Ives painters until his death on 29 August 1942.



Alfred Wallis final resting place Barnoon Cemetery overlooking The Tate and Porthmeor Beach.



Today, Wallis works are shown in galleries of modern art and his paintings are shown prominently at The Tate St. Ives' Cornwall.



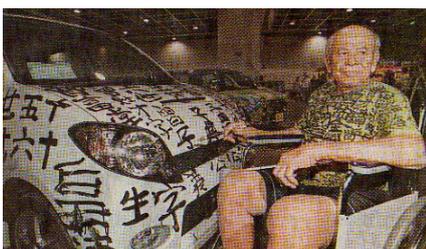
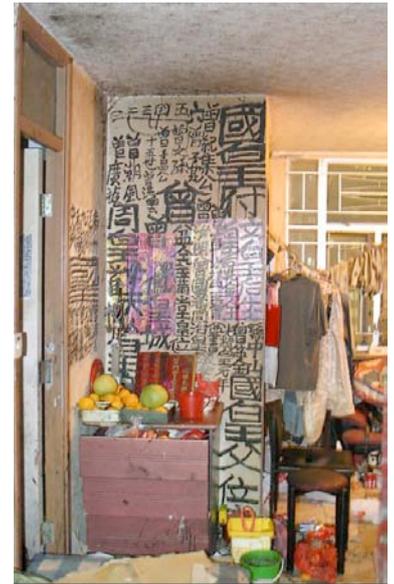
Hong Kong's 'King of Kowloon' - Tsang Tso-choi (1920 - 2007)



A special edition of a Hong Kong magazine named Tseng Tso-choi as one of the city's 10 "least influential" people.

Tsang Tsou-choi, dubbed "The King of Kowloon" after the district in which he lived - was a Hong Kong original, who never saw himself as an artist but was later hailed internationally as one.

The unemployed shabby looking disabled old man thought he was the rightful heir to most of the land in Kowloon.



Tsang became a household name in Hong Kong because of his brush-written lists of relatives' names - with royal titles. Mr. Tsang declared himself "King of Kowloon."

For more than 40 years, he shared his conviction with Hong Kong residents via his trademark black-paint scrawls including obscene and invective toward Britain's Queen Elizabeth. His calligraphy graffiti 'canvas' appeared on walls, lamp posts and electricity junction boxes all over town.



Tsang's graffiti could be said to be acts of vandalism and forced the authorities to antagonize how to deal with the man and his sense of mission.

The police pitted themselves against the graffiti artist in a cat and mouse game for years,

Sadly, Tseng's family disowned him because they thought he was a public nuisance and mentally unbalanced.

One would rather say he was an eccentric curiosity.

His calligraphy was eventually recognized by the international art world in 2003 when his work was displayed at the 50th Venice Biennial. He was heralded as "probably the oldest graffiti artist in the world." In 2004, auction house Sotheby's sold a piece by Mr. Tsang for \$7,000.



In the territory's creative world, though, the King's calligraphic style inspired fashion designers, interior decorators and CD cover artists. His work was raw and original.

Tsang stubbornly kept at his task - even on crutches in his 80s -- but was forced to retire when his legs began to fail.



The poor and disabled Hong Kong man who became a cultural icon for his unique Chinese-style street graffiti died at the age of 86 on 27 July 2007, sparking nostalgic calls to preserve his vanishing legacy.



His works are now in danger of vanishing completely. Only a few examples of his art remain, including a pillar at the Star Ferry Pier (now demolished), sparking calls by legislators, art critics and preservation experts to save these vestiges

Mr. Lau Kin-wai, an art critic and friend of Tsang's for many years, called on the Hong Kong Art Museum to mount an exhibition to pay full tribute to Tsang's legacy.

"He has already become a cultural icon and part of the collective memory of Hong Kong. His work is important for our future and past,"

Tsang's admirers say his unique art slowly permeated the local consciousness and became a part of the city's collective memory.



To some a friend but to others a bit naughty

Friends expressed sadness at the death of the "King of Kowloon", Tsang Tsou-choi, saying the city had lost a cultural icon, while others remembered him as a "naughty" and "hot-tempered" neighbour.

"I feel very sad at losing this old friend," artist and food enthusiast Lau Kin-wai said. "He was very considerate and kind. He had a photographic memory for people's faces and once he met you, he would remember you.

"His passing means the loss of a cultural icon for Hong Kong."

Fashion designer William Tang Tatchi, whose two clothing collections were inspired by Tsang's graffiti, said he admired him with all his heart.

"I did the first series in 1997 for the handover and the second series this year for its 10th anniversary. I did it

because his graffiti can truly represent Hong Kong."

The designer said the "King" was a playful character. "When I asked him about using his calligraphy in my collections, he responded happily, 'It is funny. It is very funny,'" he said.

Mr Tang said the Tsang contributed a lot to Hong Kong without knowing it.

"The content of his writing was very funny," he said. "He wrote that he was a king and the queen of England had deprived him of his rights. It was a very rebellious act in the colonial era.

"His calligraphy was unique, too. There is no one in Hong Kong who has not seen his writing. It was part of many of our lives, a sweet memory."

But Mr Tang said Tsang's family might not have revered the "King" quite as much as others did. "I know his

There is no one in Hong Kong who has not seen his writing. It was part of many of our lives, a sweet memory

William Tang, fashion designer

family often found him too naughty and he embarrassed them with his acts."

He said the funeral date had yet to be set, but it would not be a big one as the family wanted to keep it low profile.

A woman who lived near Tsang for 12 years recalled him as a naughty old

man. "His home was full of his writings. He always picked up cardboard boxes and took them home to use as a bed," said the woman.

Another neighbour who gave his name as Siu described Tsang as hot-tempered. "I talked with him sometimes but he would lose his head easily. He always muttered to himself."

Contemporary home ware and furniture chain G.O.D., which produced two series of lifestyle accessories based on Tsang's work in 1996 and this year, expects previously average sales to soar. "Hong Kong has lost a man with character, a true artist who held on to his own beliefs," company founder Douglas Young Chi-chiu said. "Mr Tsang was a pioneer."

Loretta Fong and Martin Wong



The King is Dead: Long Live the King

Brian L. Coak

August 2007