



Paul Wong – A Portrait

Among the many stars strewn across the firmament of the British Columbian contemporary arts scene, none burns brighter, to my eyes, than Paul Wong's. The career of this artist, which spans over thirty years, is reminiscent of a rock star's, filled with touring, scandals, sex, drugs and fame. More than his singularly un-Canadian attitude, it is Wong's flagrant disregard for imposed convention, moral or artistic, as well as the clear light that he shines on topics

usually consigned to the shadows, that confirm his status as an artistic pioneer.

Video portraiture has always informed Wong's work, in which the search for one's identity—sexual, ethnic or social—is expressed through gazing upon the other. The often marginalized subjects of Wong's videos serve as mirrors in which Wong sees himself. Through this intimate contact, the many sides of the artist, as well as his role as both observer and participant are thus revealed.

While Paul Wong's image is not usually seen in his video portraits, he is always present. Rather than carrying a camera on his shoulder and sharing a predictably subjective view of personality, Wong's camera is held in the hand, allowing him to present his subjects without constraints, organically and intuitively. He is thus directly engaged with his subjects, without limiting them. Wong's camera moves as an extension of both the eye and the body, creating truly expressionist portraits. His long takes bear no signs of editing, further giving the impression that what is shown is real, not constructed. While one often speaks of a subjective camera or of direct cinema, in Wong's case, it would be more fitting to speak of a hyperactive camera and of energized video.

Wong's raw and shaky images have more affinity with amateur video than the steady and detached approach most often associated with professional production. Boldly affirming the immediate need to capture the image and a crude expressiveness (both for himself and for his subjects), this self-taught artist flouts the norms of his craft in the name of creativity.

Free from the judgment of others, Wong makes his own rules, providing a knowing and sympathetic view of the world around him. More than his daring, his uniquely participatory gaze, and his integrity, it is the liberating quality of his work that makes Paul Wong an exemplary artist. I am very honoured that he has accepted this invitation to be here, and I thank him for his generosity and enlightenment.