

An Introduction to *Life Force*

by Lie Fhung



“Life Force” started off dealing with ‘Death Wish’ as well as ‘Life Force’ as in:

Life Force:

n. a concept of spiritual energy.

... a universal life force running within and between all things, and in other cases it is seen as a more localized phenomenon, such as in vitalism, subtle bodies, or somatic energies such as qi, prana or kundalini. Spiritual energy is often closely associated with the metaphor of life as breath - the words 'qi', 'prana', and 'spirit', for instance, are all related in their respective languages to the verb 'to breathe'. It is also often seen as a continuum that unites body and mind. (from Wikipedia)

To be alive. To be always in motion in search of true joy - that is the joy of being alive, of learning, of experience, of growing, of transformation, of living. Alive. Fully.

Death Wish:

n.

1. Psychiatry

a. *A desire for self-destruction, often accompanied by feelings of depression, hopelessness, and self-reproach.*

b. *The desire, often unconscious, for the death of another person, such as a parent, toward whom one has unconscious hostility.*

2. *A suicidal urge thought to drive certain people to put themselves consistently into dangerous situations.*

The work is about the continuous struggles between these principles. I have observed how this kind of struggle is constantly happening at various degrees to various kind of people - including myself. How people, often without fully realising it, are sabotaging themselves. Drawing a larger circle around it through the lens of history, I noticed that this kind of struggle also happens in larger scale, as a society, and even as a nation. People have an amazing drive and the fierce will to stay alive despite the utmost injustice, cruelty and deprivations they face (as in Holocaust, Chinese Cultural Revolution, women lives under radical Islamic law, to name a few). And yet, on the other hand, people often choose destruction and death instead - sometimes in self-inflicting ways. Life Force and Death Wish.

This brought me to the duality of human beings, of the contradictions that exist within us. How these seemingly opposite powers are often feeding off each other - propelling life to go on with death always lurking beneath. It is with this in mind that the first “Life Force” installation (at JCCAC ‘Five’ Group Exhibition in December 2013) was set within a darkened space surrounded in black. I also imagined it like a process of birth, in which the “Life Force” was still in the dark womb, almost ready to come out. The darkness around it was both nurturing and threatening at once.

In its subsequent development, I realised that the work is significantly gravitating towards the light, towards Life. It has always been so. Thus the next “Life Force” installation will be set in an all white space. Imagine entering a space enclosed with layers of plain sheer white curtains, creating a round ‘room’ with some soft spot-lights illuminating what can be said as a delicate ‘forest’ within the space. Clusters of organic shapes reminiscent of thriving plants or flowers or sea creatures hung from the ceiling. These clusters are formed by pieces of white, paper-thin porcelain perched upon some gnarly copper branches. The white “Life Force” pieces sort of blend in with their surrounding. They inhabit each other creating what seems like a peaceful, tranquil ‘forest’ in which people could wandering around - enjoying and absorbing the ‘forest’, taking from it what they would.

Now, pay closer attention. Everything there is actually set on a precarious balance that any careless movement from the audience could upset. The porcelain pieces are very thin and therefore very fragile. Their protruding 'tentacles' are particularly at risk as unaware people might accidentally collide into them and break them. To enter the "Life Force" is to take risk of breaking some of the pieces. A full presence of mind is required, which the space itself suggests.



Here "Life Force" is about taking risk. About precarious balance. About the fragility of life. About the certainty of death; anything that can break, will eventually break - it's just a matter of time. Inevitable. But it is not a futility. You enjoy it as it lasts. You make the best out of it. It is also about the value of fragility. So fragile, so delicate it is precious. So precious you want them to last. So precious you are afraid of damaging them. So precious you just want to smash them and be free from the worry of damaging them. Life Force and Death Wish.

It implies the tender trepidation in the process of creating the extremely fragile pieces, the painstaking attention demanded. A light and firm touch is a must. There is an awareness of the risks being taken. There is an acceptance, a kind of surrender to let go should the piece break at any point of its life: during the shaping of the forms, during the refining process, during the firing, during the unloading after the firing, during the extricating process, during the storing, the packing, the transporting, the shipping, the setting up, the showing, the taking down, the packing, the transporting, the shipping, the storing and so forth. About inner peace. Being peaceful among uncertainties, among things on precarious balance, among the risks of being alive.

Due to the extremely fragile nature of this work, it seems inevitable that at a piece or two might be accidentally broken. When this happens, I will collect the shards and grind them into fine gravels that could be used as *chamotte*. When mixed with clay, *chamotte* would increase the strength of the clay body and the resulting work. Thus the dead Life Force pieces would be reincarnated into new works; death gives new, stronger life. Here, we arrive at the circle of life: nothing is futile. Even in its destruction, in its death, Life Force perpetuates new lives.