

# **THE HONG KONG AGENT**

## **By Robert Iolini**

### **WHAT IS THE HKA?**

*video art series, gallery installation, radio feature, online interactive & locative media*

At the heart of the project are eighteen audio-visual episodes that follow the adventures of an enigmatic protagonist, simply referred to as The Agent. His poetic renderings of what he experiences, and the stories and dialogues of numerous characters he encounters reveal the richly layered complex world of Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Agent is an interdisciplinary project, bringing together the aesthetics of poetry, cinema, anthropology, video art, sound art, collaboration, documentary and music.

### **SUMMARY**

On the first day of 2007 a mysterious agent arrives in Hong Kong on an unspecified mission. His interpretation of the events he witnesses and participates in, provide an idiosyncratic yet insightful reading of life in Hong Kong.

### **SYNOPSIS**

On the first day of 2007 a mysterious agent arrives in Hong Kong on an unspecified mission. His encounters with activists, sidewalk shamans, a feng shui master, teenage hopefuls, artists, shopping arcades, ghost buses and psychedelic trains become intriguing clues with which to de-code the city and its inhabitants. His interpretation of the events he witnesses and participates in, provide an idiosyncratic yet insightful reading of life in Hong Kong. Local perceptions are explored in scripted scenes in which characters relate personal experiences and engage in compelling dialogues on subjects ranging from the 10th anniversary of reunification to shamanic healing.

### **WHO IS ROBERT IOLINI?**

Robert Iolini is a media artist, composer and radio producer. For the past fifteen years Iolini has been producing innovative and meaningful time-based media works that are stylistically diverse, and united by a philosophical approach. Iolini makes work about humans and how we behave in contemporary cultural environments. His artworks embrace cinema, anthropology, video art, sound art, documentary and music.

## **ARTIST'S STATEMENT**

### **ground level**

The Hong Kong Agent is a project designed to allow multiple ways of accessing content. It aims to enhance and expand a person's experience of the work by presenting its content in a variety of forms and contexts. For example, the locative media version allows people to actually experience the work from the inside, so to speak, using their mobile phone or handheld device they assume the role of the agent, physically visiting the location of a specific scene presented in the narrative. The interactive version allows people via a website to download raw content from the work in order to make their own version. For the less adventurous there are short film, feature film and gallery installation versions.

In 2007 I spent seven months living on Hong Kong island. I was the fortunate recipient of two artist residencies (Australia-china council & Asialink). My mission? Apply my skills as a media artist to create a multi form art work that could reflect and perhaps even provide insights into Hong Kong society ten years after its reunification with china.

Assuming the role of a poet – anthropologist - flaneur, I set out to experience the city. To my surprise I found myself profoundly affected by my encounters with its people and spaces. Even though I was constantly exhilarated by the pervasive vitality of the place - at least once a day a seemingly banal situation would trigger in me an inexplicable sense of melancholy. These two elements imbue the work.

While in Hong Kong I met and worked with many local artists, scholars, writers and activists. I gave seminars about my works at several universities and was provided with a student intern to help realise my project. I like to work directly with material I collect in the field. However in this project I also created 'set-pieces' in which I manufactured an alternative hybrid version of actual events, using professional or non- professional actors. I even managed to insert myself into the work. So the work is simultaneously autobiography, documentary and fiction.

### **vertical narratives**

Creating a time based art work that can retain its integrity across a number of platforms is an ambitious brief to fulfil and presents an interesting challenge when dealing with rules of engagement and storytelling. Therefore it was necessary to devise a suitable narrative form that can accommodate reconfiguring and repurposing of narrative content without sacrificing meaning and dramatic thrust.

The modular nature of the narrative renders ordering of episodes arbitrary, as each episode is a self-contained, finely wrought audio visual set piece. The Hong Kong Agent does not follow a linear narrative, the story is directed by the protagonist's experiences and descriptions of events. It is the information embedded in these events that is compelling, not how they came to be.

The narrative is vertical rather than horizontal (like the structure of the city which the denizens of Hong Kong inhabit). Thus the journey is into rather than along the narrative - vertical narratives.

The future? In my humble opinion I believe this project has the potential to be a very practical template, perhaps even a manifesto of sorts, which may be of benefit to fellow creatives. I would like to encourage potential agents to use this model to create works. I intend to create a series of works under the umbrella title 'The Agent Project'. My next mission will be in Japan. *Robert Iolini 2008*

## THE HKA VERSIONS

### VIDEO ART SERIES



Shot on location in Hong Kong 2007. Visually the work is a blend of documentary footage and set-pieces. Locations range from Japanese style teenage/kidult micro malls, public housing estates, and subterranean transport hubs to elaborate religious festivals. The soundtrack is a provocative mix of field recordings & interviews, and features the music of local Hong Kong independent artists. The cast and crew made up entirely of local Hong Kong people.

#### Production Details

**Title:** The Hong Kong Agent

**Writer/Director:** Robert Iolini

**Genre:** Drama + Documentary + Experimental + Fiction

**Original Format:** HDV Colour + B/W

**Aspect Ratio:** 16.9

**Sound:** Stereo

**Duration:** 80 Minutes

**Language:** English/Cantonese

**Pre Production:** Hong Kong SAR China

**Post Production:** Byron Bay Australia June 2008 (Funded by Screen Australia)

**Cast:** Chan Tsz Ting, Cally YU, Pocky + Donald CHAN, Steven PANG, Eno YIM, MA Kwan Kak, Karin LEUNG, Alex YU, Robert IOLINI

**Camera:** CHAN Tsz Ting, Beatrix PANG, Christopher LAU, Nicolas SAURET, Robert IOLINI

**Music:** Snowblind, Dickson Dee, stealstealground, Robert IOLINI

**Producers:** Frank Haines Films

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## ONLINE INTERACTIVE



A collaboration between Robert Iolini and Pool - an open-source online project developed by Australian Broadcasting Corporation Radio National. It's a place to share your creative work - upload music, photos, videos, documentaries, interviews, animations and more. It's a collaborative space where audiences become makers.

Visit **Pool** [http://pool.org.au/content/hong\\_kong\\_agent](http://pool.org.au/content/hong_kong_agent) to download, remix and upload your own versions of The Hong Kong Agent.

## INSTALLATIONS

**Lismore Regional Gallery, Australia** | Group show  
21 November - 17 January 2009 HOME - an exhibition about home, identity and  
connectedness.



**Hong Kong Arts Centre (HKAC), Hong Kong, China** | Group show  
3 - 29 August 2008 30th ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION



**Gallery 4a Asia-Australia Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia** | Solo show  
14 June - 26 July 2008 NIGHTVISION SERIES

## LOCATIVE MEDIA / MOBILE PHONE



A series of short audio/visual episodes specially edited for mobile devices. You can download the 3gp and mp3 clips below and install them onto your mobile device for free. If you're in Hong Kong, go to the locations on the maps provided for a special experience:-) These mobile versions were initially part of The Hong Kong Agent: installation version, exhibited at the Hong Kong Art Centre throughout August 2008.

*For the people of Hong Kong, space is a rare commodity; the handheld device has become an effective means for the individual to personalise almost any public space. The Hong Kong Agent mobile version plays with this phenomenon by presenting its own highly personalised content on ostensibly private hand-held devices in a public space for individual use. The novel context(s) and content of the installation will allow the user to reflect on their use of personal and public space, technology, and on the nature of the place and time they inhabit. Iolini 2008*

## **RADIO PROGRAMS**



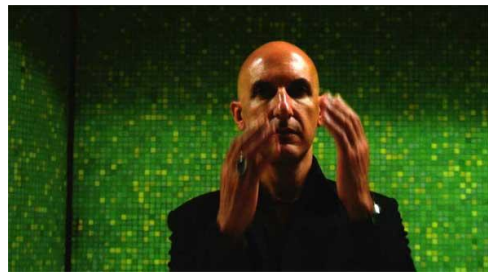
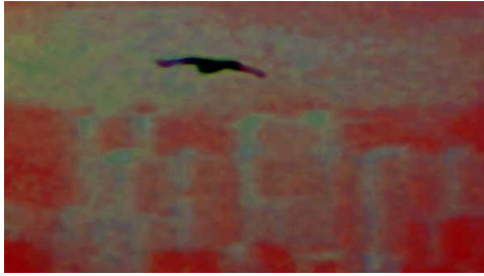
A 90 minute radio program commissioned by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for their popular experimental radio show 'THE NIGHT AIR'.



A 10 minute radio program entitled *WORM SWALLOWS TIGER* specially made for *All Day Every Day* a series broadcast on Resonance104.4fm - London's arts radio station.



**IMAGE GALLERY**





## ARTICLES / REVIEWS

### **Hong Kong Economic Journal** **P33 | 文化 | 觀自在 | By 劉建華 2008-09-01**

*"In the context of the HKAC 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition Robert Iolini, a "flaneur" in Hong kong, has produced in his work The Hong Kong Agent, the most reflective on local life and political atmosphere."*

Excerpt from full review in Chinese

### **Art Collector Magazine**

24 June, 2008

*Iolini coming to a phone near you*

Robert Iolini has become one of the first in Australia to offer video art by mobile phone download. Visitors to Sydney's Gallery 4A are now able to download 10 micro-sodes from his work titled The Hong Kong Agent to their mobile or iPod, and 'mash' them to their heart's content. If you'd prefer to leave the mashing alone, you'll still be able to see the whole work in the gallery's front window from sunrise to sunset until 26 July.

<http://www.artcollector.net.au/>

## 由 Ghost in the Shell 走到 Hong Kong Express From Ghost in the Shell to Hong Kong Express

趙嘉薇 Edith Chiu

Robert Iolini has made a profound connection with Hong Kong dating back to his collaboration with Dr. Philip Mar to produce a sound work *Hong Kong: City in Between* in 1997 by mixing sound, conversation, commercials and Cantonese opera although Iolini had not yet been to Hong Kong then. The use of sound montage created a soundscape blending reality and fiction with a grotesque and alienated atmosphere encapsulated in a ghost-like city.

As a flâneur of great intellect and sentiment, Iolini came to Hong Kong for the tenth anniversary of Hong Kong's handover exploring sound and images in early 2007. He made acquaintances and conducted interviews with numerous Hong Kong people to get a thorough understanding of the city, resulting in the production of 18 shorts, collectively entitled *The Hong Kong Agent*, with corresponding and contrasting styles. The sound and visual montages expand a multi-dimensional space, interpreting the customs, politics, culture and history of Hong Kong and generate exuberant energy with a sense of sadness. It also tells touching stories with tremendous amount of humanity.

This multi-platform project uses a Bluetooth component through which visitors can download ten micro-sodes of *The Hong Kong Agent* to their mobile phones, MP3 players and other handheld devices. By enjoying the micro-sodes with these devices at the HKAC and other specific locations, the individual may personalise any public space, thus enriching the art appreciation process with a completely new meaning and experience.



- 1 攝製過程 On location
- 2 以藍牙系統下載《香港漫遊者》片段  
Download the micro-sodes of  
*The Hong Kong Agent* via  
Bluetooth transmission

羅拔·艾奧里尼與香港結緣，始自他與菲獵瑪博士在一九九七年創作了一個關於香港回歸的聲音作品，但那時羅拔卻從未到過香港，對香港的感覺是種想像，他們擷取香港的聲音、廣告及粵曲等元素創作《香港：城市越界》，以聲音蒙太奇的手法締造現實與虛構的聲音環境（soundscape）作品，營造詭異疏離的氣氛，猶如鬼域。

在二零零七年初，羅拔來到香港，以一個漫遊者的心態為香港十年回歸紀念作影音的探索，在七個月的時間內結識及訪問不少香港人，從而更透徹瞭解香港，並能具體與立體地表現香港。他剪輯了十八部不同風格的短片互通脈絡及作對比，創作《香港漫遊者》，這些作品富音樂性的結構，節奏緩急有致，知性與感性並融，以聲音及影像蒙太奇建構多元及多層次的空間景域，詮釋香港風俗、政治、文化及歷史，表現了城市活力隱含的哀愁；當中又縷述人的故事，鏡頭下處處傾注感情，深刻動容。

這個多元平台計劃更以藍牙系統，將其聲音及影像片段下載至手提電話、MP3、PSP等，並到藝術中心及不同的公眾空間收聽與觀看，利用特定的環境與作品的影音蒙太奇互動，締造私密及個人的公眾空間，引發簇新的意義及經驗。

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d/Lux/MediaArts

 AURA INTERACTIVE



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Extra special thanks to anthropologist Dr Phillip Mar for his enduring support, exhaustive research and for instilling in me an ethical and scientific approach to field work.

Between January 1 - July 31, 2007 Robert was Artist in Residence in Hong Kong. @ Robert Black College HKU - Residency supported by Australia-China Council.

@ ACO (arts & culture outreach) Foo Tak Building Wan Chai - Residency supported by Asialink (funded by the Australia Council, the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body)

Robert was also Visiting Scholar/Professional @ Journalism & Media Studies Centre The University of Hong Kong

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## **CONTACT | INFO**

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### **High Resolution images, CV and trailer can be downloaded at:**

<http://www.hongkongagent.iolini.com/>