

M M I D A M

Baloise Art Prize 2023

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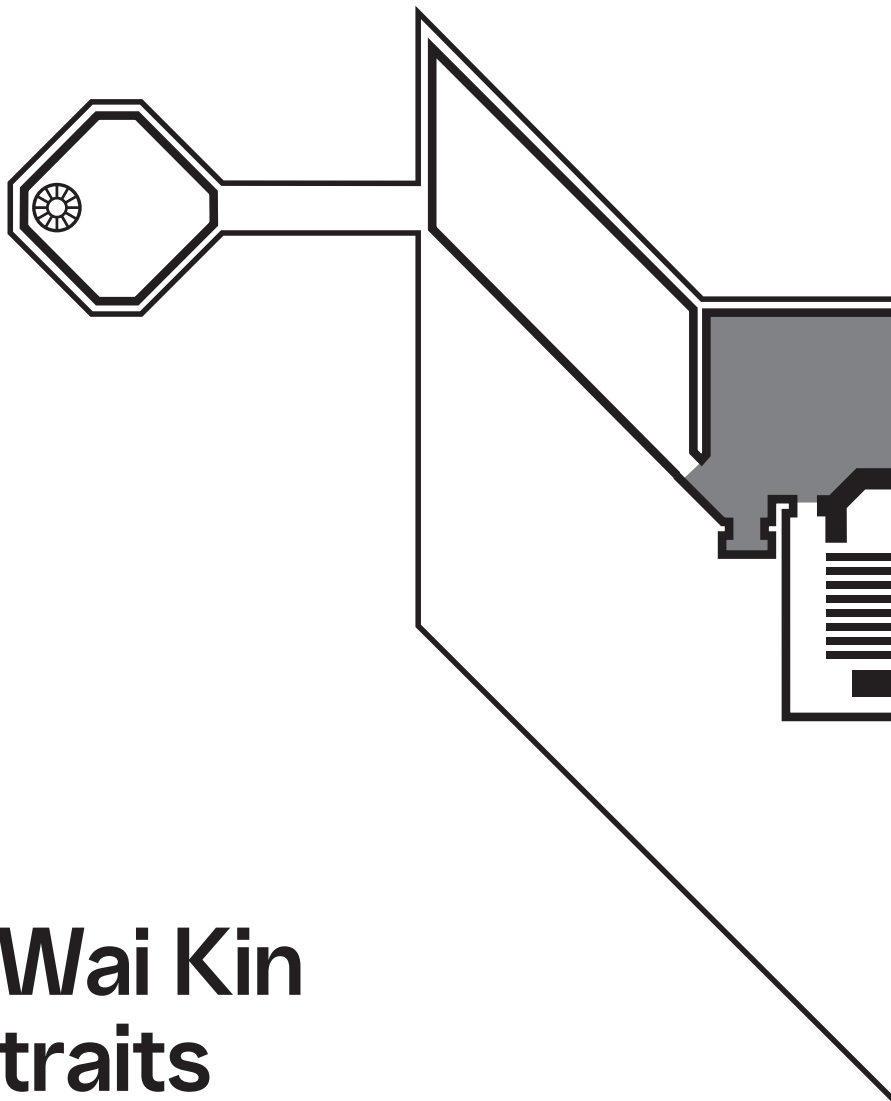


Sin Wai Kin Portraits

29.03 — 09.06.2024

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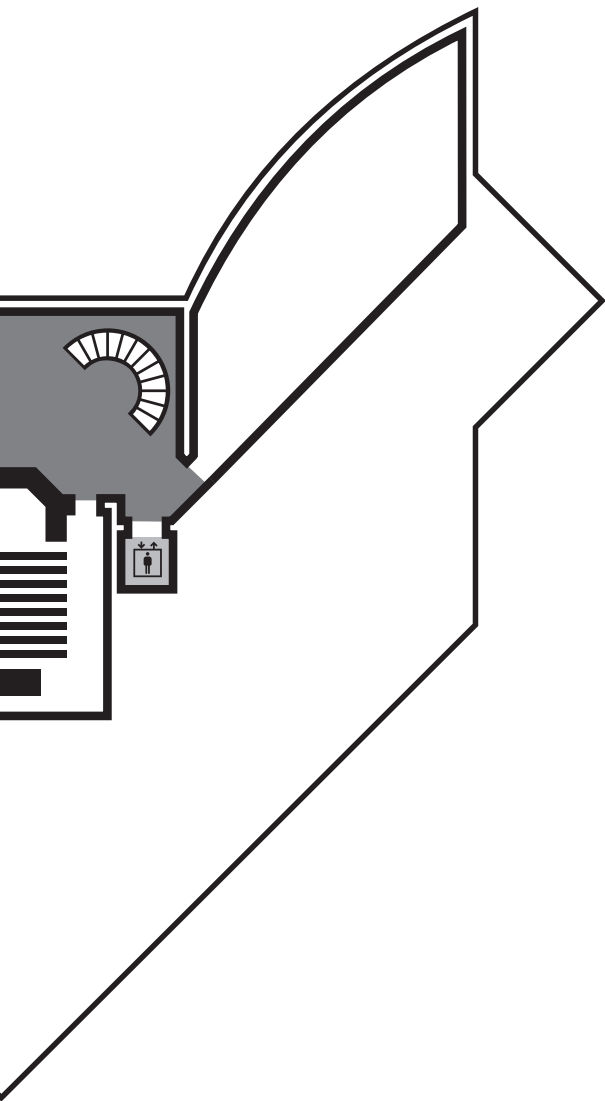
29.03 — 09.06.2024

Curators

Marie-Noëlle Farcy, assisted by Carlotta Pierleoni

Production

David Celli, Minh-Khanh Dinh, Jordan Gerber,
Richard Goedert, Thierry Gratien, Matthias Heittbrink,
Juliette Hesse, Clara Kremer, Lourindo Soares



Level -1
Foyer

The exhibition

Portraits transforms the Foyer of Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean into a space for the exploration of the possibilities of storytelling, and of perceived notions of reality. Enclosed within a white curtained structure are five moving image artworks from the series *Portraits* (2023 – ongoing) by artist Sin Wai Kin (b. 1991, Toronto). Hanging like in a traditional painting gallery, the works expand on the art historical pictorial tradition of portraiture through the chosen medium and their protagonists. Sin's practice, which includes performance, moving images, writing and print, uses speculative fiction to dissolve assumptions around objective truths. The artist seeks to surpass gendered and normative approaches to identity, drawing attention to the construction of the physical body within the social body, meaning the representations, uses, habits and desires of bodies in society. Playing in a continuous loop on the screens, the characters that Sin personifies in this specific series reference iconic artworks and literary stories to explore impermanent identities and realities.

The embodiment of fantasy is central in the artist's practice, wherein the external appearance of Sin's figures, and the worlds they inhabit, are shaped by a myriad of sources, among which traditional Chinese dramaturgy, drag and science fiction. *The Universe*, with its floral face-paint, alludes to the mighty male Jing role in Cantonese opera. The video work directly references the painted rendition of the Taoist story 'The Butterfly Dream' made in circa 1550 by the Chinese painter, calligrapher, and poet Lù Zhì (b. 1496, Suzhou, China – d. 1576, China). The parable is a passage from the *Zhuangzi*, one of the two foundational texts of Taoism named after its traditional author, the philosopher Zhuang Zhou (b. circa 369 BC –

d. circa 286 BC, China) written by him and others during the Warring States period (476 – 221 BC). In this story, Zhuangzi dreams of being a butterfly and, upon waking up, begins to wonder if he is a man who dreamed of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming of being a man. The story references notions of transformation and of subjective reality through the state of dreaming as a means to explore the idea of alternative worlds. Sin identifies with 'The Butterfly Dream' because it encapsulates how the artist's world 'seems like a made-up fantasy for some people', and how 'we are living in a world where many different realities coexist'.

Some of the protagonists have been previously used in other works by Sin Wai Kin. Wai King, the heartthrob in *It's Always You* (2021), is reimagined in the guise of a hypermasculine version of Caravaggio's (b. 1571, Milan – d. 1610, Porto Ercole) *Narcissus* (1597–1599). Witnessing his act of self-absorption is a reminder of our own perceived self-identity in relation to the perception of ourselves by others. With *Change*, the artist channels Frida Kahlo's (b. 1907 – d. 1954, Mexico City) *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940), adopting Kahlo's penetrating outward gaze in this embracing of one's masculine side. *The Storyteller* is a recurring character played by Sin Wai Kin, appearing in previous works like *Today's Top Stories* (2020) and *The Breaking Story* (2022). Inspired by the authoritative figure of the newsreader, the character reports polarising perspectives and philosophical propositions on existence, consciousness, and identity. The figure in the *Portraits* video, set in a futuristic, arid, outer-space environment, stares at us as they adopt the pose from Leonardo da Vinci's (b. 1452, Anchiano, Italy – d. 1519, Amboise, France) *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503–1506). In *The Construct*, which references Man Ray's (b. 1890, Philadelphia – d. 1976, Paris) Surrealist

photograph *Noire et Blanche* (1926), Sin directly confronts the idea of binaries versus multitudes contained within individuals, essential in understanding the construction of identity. In contrast to the other works, the artist sets *Change* and *The Construct* in an enveloping chroma-green space. The same colour is used in filmmaking for altering surroundings and contexts through post-production techniques, and it has been an integral part of all presentations of the *Portraits* thus far. Immersed in the same hue, the characters in these two works feel somewhat grounded in a space that feels closer to our real life, sparking reflections on our own ongoing, potential transformations.

The protagonists' ever-changing evolution exemplifies the artist's exploration of gender hybridity and their challenging of ideas around binarities, all the while being, as the artist posits, vehicles to work through personal aspects of their own complex identity. In their almost imperceptible movements, the living portraits push the limits of the pictorial tradition, and the subject's capacity of displaying an awareness of the viewer's gaze, sometimes powerfully holding it. Standing in front of the screens, viewers will see characters walk in, control the place they inhabit, and walk out – performing for us within this theatrical space. The faceless bust, with a character's wig outside the boundaries of the video does not idly stand by to act as sculpture: it jolts the characters into our tangible world, remaining far, existing somewhere beyond the frame, inviting us into their world of new possibilities.





Tradition meets fantasy in Sin Wai Kin's subversion of storytelling

Interview with the artist Sin Wai Kin, conducted by Hannah Silver for *Wallpaper** article published on 24 November, 2023, in occasion of Sin's exhibition *Portraits* at London's Soft Opening gallery.

Hannah Silver: Your series *Portraits* draws on a variety of artistic and cultural references. Why did you weave these into the work? Why were you interested in exploring self-identity – and challenging dominant narratives – in this context?

Sin Wai Kin: I have been focused on the act of storytelling for the past few years and how it not only represents but creates reality. History is storytelling and I wanted to draw attention to art history and the construction of the subject. Images operate in the same way as storytelling, they construct at the same time as they represent, and the western history of art is there in the genealogy of images when we look at anything. I chose to weave my characters into these existing art historical works in order to make that relationship explicit, and to think about the relationship between the author and the subject. I am addressing dominant narratives in order to present alternatives. The construction of my characters is in a way addressing the construction of the self since I play all my characters, but a cornerstone of my practice is 'the more personal, the more universal'. Each character focuses on a different area of research or binary that I am trying to undo, so each of these works is a literal meditation on those themes and a continuation of my practice of embodied speculative fiction.

HS: Can you tell us a bit about how you have presented your work in this exhibition? It is interesting to me that the juxtaposition of media, with theatrical elements and considered positioning of

the works – with screens on walls as if they are paintings – seem to reflect the challenging of normative narratives also present in the work.

SWK: The works are presented on screens whose sizes are relative to the artworks they are referencing. The screens are performing as paintings, which is why they sit on the wall at painting height in front of a white theatrical curtain. The white curtains reference the white cube, the default 'neutral' art space of the art world. The installation is demonstrating that the white cube is not a neutral or empty space but one that is itself performing a hegemonic narrative.

HS: The blurring of fantasy and reality, seen especially in the art historical references in the films, invites us to consider the role of context, and how it can shift. It seems to me a natural lens through which to interrogate historical judgements around binaries. Could you tell me more about how you approach this theme?

SWK: The binary of individual and context is something I am trying to express through the use of chroma green. Individuals are a reflection of the context in which they are produced, are a part of it and inseparable from it. All of these works were shot on green screen, in some cases I have chosen to replace the screen with a CGI (Computer-generated imagery) background, others I have left in order to make clear the means of construction of the works and to leave an infinite possibility in the relationship of the subject and context. The second room of the exhibition mimics the film studio where the works were shot as well as creating a play on a 'green room', the room backstage where performers often get ready and relax off stage. As people enter this room, I want them to be the performers, to question their relationship to their context, and invite that infinite possibility.







The artist

Sin Wai Kin (b. 1991, Toronto) has held solo exhibitions and performances at Fondazione Memmo, Rome (2023); Somerset House, London (2022); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2022); Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (2020) and Taipei Contemporary Art Centre, Taipei (2018). Their work has been presented within significant group surveys, including MOCA, Toronto (2024); Kunsthall Trondheim (2024); UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing (2024); Doosan Art Center, Seoul (2022); Tate Liverpool, Liverpool (2022); ICA, Los Angeles (2022); Shedhalle, Zurich (2021); Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai (2021) and Hayward Gallery, London (2019). Their work is held in several major collections, including those of the British Museum – Prints and Drawings Department, London; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo and M+ Museum, Hong Kong. Sin Wai Kin lives and works in London.

Baloise Art Prize

Sin Wai Kin is the recipient of the 24th Baloise Art Prize. Founded in 1999, the prize is awarded annually at Art Basel to two artists exhibiting within the Statements section of the fair. The Baloise Art Prize has focused its support on young artists reserving a part of the award to donate one or an ensemble of works by the artists to two of the partner museums. Mudam Luxembourg has been one of the partner museums for the Baloise Art Prize since 2015, and through this partnership, three of the works on display will be donated to Mudam's growing collection.

Public programme

Lunchtime at Mudam

29.03.2024 | 12h30 – 13h30

With the artist Sin Wai Kin

Lunchtime at Mudam

07.06.2024 | 12h30 – 13h30

Guided tour

15.05.2024 | 18h00 – 18h30 | EN

With Carlotta Pierleoni, Curatorial
Research Fellow

Mudamini workshop:

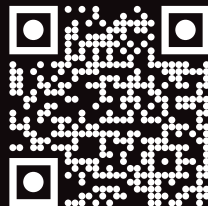
La magie du portrait

23.05.2024 | 14h30 – 16h30 | Age 9–12

30.05.2024 | 10h00 – 12h00 | Age 9–12

30.05.2024 | 14h30 – 16h30 | Age 6–8

06.06.2024 | 14h30 – 16h30 | Age 6–8



Full programme on
mudam.com

Pascal Aubert, Sarah Beaumont,
Joyce Becker, Sandra Biwer,
Geoffroy Braibant, David Celli,
Michelle Cotton, Diane Durinck,
Zuzana Fabianova, Clarisse Fahrtmann,
Marie-Noëlle Farcy, Sylvie Fasbinder,
Paula Fernandes, Clara Froumenty,
Christophe Gallois, Jordan Gerber,
Richard Goedert, Thierry Gratien,
Matthias Heitbrink, Christine Henry,
Juliette Hesse, Camille d'Huart,
Clara Jeanneau, Julie Jephos,
Germain Kerschen, Yousra Khalis,
Clara Kremer, Deborah Lambolez,
Laurence Le Gal, Vanessa Lecomte,
Guillaume Lemuhot, Nathalie Lesure,
Carine Lilliu, Ioanna Madenoglu,
Frédéric Maraud, Tawfik Matine El Din,
António Mendes, Laura Mescolini,
Mélanie Meyer, Clément Minighetti,
Barbara Neiseler, Carlotta Pierleoni,
Markus Pilgram, Inès Planchenault,
Clémentine Proby, Boris Reiland,
Susana Rodrigues, Alexandre Sequeira,
Elodie Simonian, Lourindo Soares,
Bettina Steinbrügge, Joel Valabrega,
Vere Van Gool, Sam Wirtz, Ana Wiscour.

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Images:
 Cover, p. 11: Sin Wai Kin, *Wai King*, 2023 (detail)
 Collection Mudam Luxembourg
 Donation 2023 – Baloise
 Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London
 pp. 6-7: Sin Wai Kin, *The Universe*, 2023 (detail)
 Collection Mudam Luxembourg
 Donation 2023 – Baloise
 Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London
 p. 9: Sin Wai Kin, *The Storyteller*, 2023 (detail)
 Collection Mudam Luxembourg
 Acquisition 2024
 Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London
 p. 10: Sin Wai Kin, *Change*, 2023 (detail)
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 Courtesy of the artist and Soft Opening, London

Acknowledgements

Mudam Luxembourg – Musée d'Art Moderne
 Grand-Duc Jean thanks the Ministry
 of Culture, members of the Cercle des
 collectionneurs, all the donors and sponsors,
 and particularly

The Leir Foundation,
 M. and Mme Norbert Becker-Dennewald,
 Cargolux, Luxembourg High Security Hub,
 Allen & Overy, Banque Degroof Petercam,
 Clearstream, JTI

as well as

Uniqlo, Arendt & Medernach,
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 Luxembourg, Bank of America,
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 Elvinger, Hoss & Prussen, Société Générale,
 Soludec, Spuerkeess, Bonn & Schmitt,
 Dussmann Services, Indigo Park Services,
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