

# PRINT IMAGING PRACTICE: FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COLLECTIVE PRACTICE

Wilson Yeung Chun Wai

This article discusses the author's transition from artist to curator and cultural producer of contemporary print exhibitions. By exploring the creative process of three exhibitions, including *I AM that I AM* (2015) at IMPACT 9 in Hangzhou (China), *Out of the Matrix 3.0* (2018) at IMPACT 10 in Santander (Spain), and *Out of the Matrix 2.0* (2019) at Hong Kong Open Printshop in Hong Kong (SAR, China), this paper uses personal reflections on the relationship between artistic practice, collaboration, and collective creation in cross-cultural print exhibition works. These research projects provide an opportunity to investigate specific elements of print productions from printmaking practice to collaborative curation.



Figure 1

## BACKGROUND

During my PhD research, I was interested in collective curatorial practice and how artist-curators can become cultural producers, in particular in the print world. In 2013, I began to study contemporary printmaking at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. Since then, I have started to establish a series of experimental curatorial projects with other print artists. These projects combine printmaking practice with curation and collaborative practice. As an artist with a Chinese background living in Australia, this collaborative curatorial practice made me consider the relationship between 'cultural curating' (O'Neill, 2012) and art production. It also prompted me to reflect on the interrelationship between the roles of artists, curators, and cultural producers in my print exhibition practice.

## PRINT PRACTICE TURN

What fascinated me at the IMPACT 9 conference was the idea of exploring the evolution of contemporary printmaking formats. The conference discussed the idea of printmaking in the post-print era (Kong, 2014) and examined the structure of traditional print production. For instance, the transition from personal printmaking practice to artistic collaboration in print exhibitions has significantly changed. Compared with traditional printmaking, contemporary printmaking has become more open, diverse, and interactive in its creation, presentation methods, and production process. These insights led me to explore the process of transforming two-dimensional printmaking into three-dimensional print production in the contemporary art era.

In contemporary printmaking, the conversion of two-dimensional prints into three-dimensional installations is not a new idea. For example, the Chinese artist Xu Bing has harnessed printmaking in the creation of many large-scale installations, such as *A Book from Sky and Ghosts Pounding the Wall*, stepping away from traditional modes of display

## Figure Titles and Information

Figure 1: *I AM that I AM* (2014) by Wilson Yeung. Pinhole photograph and monotype, 210 x 297mm

(Tong, 2014). A South African artist, William Kentridge, used his diverse and complex printmaking techniques in his installations and set design. Kentridge used the approach of 'art as a thinking process' to create three-dimensional objects, animations, and installations (Southbank Centre, 2013). Considering the significance of mixed media and printed imaging material in creating installation art, French contemporary conceptual artist Christian Boltanski constructed his photography installation in exhibition spaces using lights and portrait photos to visually depict the twilight space in his memory (Boltanski, 1997). In researching the printmaking practice of these contemporary artists, I learned how they integrated interdisciplinary artistic approaches into the printmaking process, and I reflected on how these artists present their printmaking displays in the form of 'prints as objects'.

From 2014 to 2015, I created *I AM that I AM*. During the creative process, I investigated the idea of converting prints into installations and extended my work from two-dimensional to three-dimensional displays. *I AM that I AM* is a print-based work created by 31 pinhole images and 31 monotypes. The title of this work is taken from the Bible, Exodus 3:14, which means that 'I AM' is the only way God chooses to introduce himself (Piper, 1984). This work explored the concept of uniqueness of identity and self-identity through personal portraits.

For a month, I had been using a pinhole camera to take self-portraits every day and analysing these portraits using the monotype method. I chose to use pinhole images and monotypes because of their 'unique impression'. In the creative process, I used the method of Monotyping, which involves placing each pinhole photo under a glass plate, painting the glass over each photo with white paint, and then printing 31 images of it on black paper. I combined 31 pinhole photos with every monotype and turned them into a series of digital images. Then, I enlarged and projected the composite image to different exhibition spaces to explore the composition and transformation of different size spaces and abstract portrait patterns. This experiment mimicked the magnifying lens of black room photography to explore the interaction between the change in image size and spatial projection.

To study the effect of changing the printing scale, I divided each image into four parts and printed them according to my height - 175cm. The connection of the printed work to my own dimension makes the work appear to be a part of my body and extends into the three-dimensional exhibition space with my two-dimensional height variable. Throughout the large-scale display of prints, the prints are seen as free-standing abstract markers when viewed from up close while retaining the illusion of a partially hidden and partially visible remote portrait. Viewers can clearly see the image of pinhole photos and single-word scratches under the large print. Additionally, I created 31 images based on my 30cm head size and converted them to a lightbox format for *Trace*, my solo exhibition at First Site Gallery at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. These twinkling lightboxes were displayed chronologically in the dark exhibition space.



Figure 2

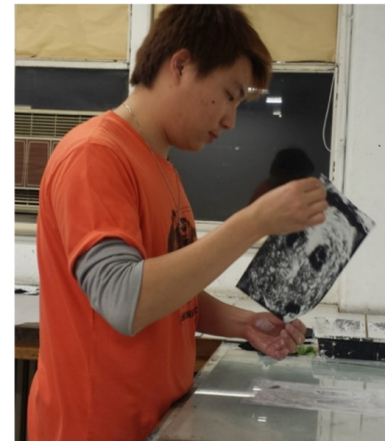


Figure 3



Figure 4

Figures 2-3: The process of creating print works between the RMIT University campus and Print Studio  
 Figure 4: A Pinhole photograph

Later, at the IMPACT 9 conference, I transformed the presentation of these 31 images into a framed work exhibited at the Sanshang Contemporary Art Museum in Hangzhou, China. I learned that each experimental layout produces distinctive effects by trialling various ways of installing work in different exhibition environments. The selected printmaking methods and spatial organisation create a variety of expressions and provide me with insights for contemporary artists to display experimental prints and installations in the exhibition space. In these creative processes, each print installations become unique and individual.

### PRINT ARTISTS AS CURATORS

After creating the above exhibitions, I became interested in showing experimental printmaking installations and curating exhibitions. In 2016, when I was studying for a master's degree in art curating at the University of Sydney, I began exploring various curatorial methods in print exhibitions. I examined the role of the artist-curator in exhibition production. Some scholars assert that the figure of the artist-curator in contemporary art originated in the early 1930s. The artworks, exhibition projects, and texts of artists, including Marcel Duchamp (Wiehager & Neuburger, 2018), Mel Bochner (Filipovic, 2017), and Young British Artists (Berens, 2008), have attracted increasing attention in the modern and contemporary art circles. However, the actual practice of the artist-curator has not been well explored. In this paper, therefore, I would like to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of artists' curatorial methods in art exhibitions.

At the IMPACT 10 conference, I co-curated the exhibition *Out of the Matrix 3.0* with Australian artist Richard Harding and Spanish artist Estefanía Salas. The exhibition was held at the Central Library of Cantabria in Santander, Spain. It featured six print artists, including Ruth Johnstone (Australia), Jazmina Cininas (Australia), Fung Ho-Yin (Hong Kong), Chan Lai-Kuen Flora (Hong Kong), Saskia Rodríguez (Spain) and Andrea Familiar Llopis (Spain). This project aimed to investigate the concept of a print exhibition with cross-cultural backgrounds and the implementation of collaborative curatorial practices. Although Harding, Salas, and I come from three different cultures, we have similar artistic experiences. All of us have received training as printmakers and have actively participated in organising art exhibitions. As artist-curators with a background in printmaking, we might understand contemporary print materials better than curators in conventional museums and art galleries, and we might have more genuine communication with print artists. We see curation as an extension of our printmaking practices and exhibiting as part of our artistic practice. During the exhibition installation, we explored different methods of displaying print works. We decided not to follow history, conventions, or even general rules, such as hanging all pieces on the same centreline. Instead, we used 'collaboration as a strategy' in our exhibition production, including curatorial dialogues and improvisation.



Figure 5



Figure 6

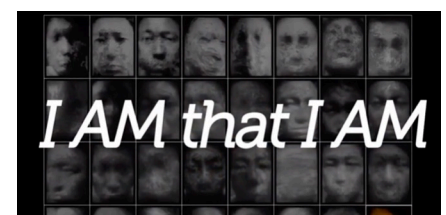


Figure 7

Figure 5: A monotype  
 Figure 6: A combined image  
 Figure 7: Youtube video of the exhibition *Trace*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=16&v=kI6-Sk9sykU&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=16&v=kI6-Sk9sykU&feature=emb_logo)

Australian artist-curator Ruth Johnstone points out in her book *The Artist Curates* (2016) that the dialogue between artists and curators is an archive. Still, it is 'a form of creating fertile soil for future projects'. Likewise, art historian Grant Kester states the following: 'in dialogical practices, the act of collaboration is more extensive and involves a conscious effort to thematise creative agency. Dialogical practices also involve a more fluid or open understanding of the work of art as a finished product' (Juskowiak & Skórzyńska, 2013). In *Out of the Matrix 3.0*, the continuous curatorial dialogue was to enhance the plasticity of artwork display and the development of the exhibition creation, which is always more dynamic and creative than simply choosing exhibition artworks. Dialogue helps the curatorial team improve our imagination and strengthen the team's collaborative relationship in exhibition production. For instance, the curatorial conversation created a positive environment for collaboration between artists and curators and formed a democratic posture through the exchange of exhibition works. The curatorial dialogue was an essential part of collaborative art practice. Artists and curators can focus on discussing how the exhibition will be presented, stay in close contact with the team, and even create an environment for collective art practice.

Improvisation was another method we used to curate this exhibition. Our intention was not to incorporate the prints of the exhibition into a larger narrative but rather to distribute them as unique and aesthetic objects. During the production of the exhibition, Salas and I devised a collaborative approach to installing print works. We improvised with three exhibition assistants to support the development of the exhibition design. Since the assistants were newbies in exhibition-making and had no experience in installing art exhibitions, Salas and I encouraged them to experiment with the process of hanging works and freely discuss the 'exhibition in the process' results. The *Out of the Matrix 3.0* exhibition was conducted openly and satisfactorily with all collaborators rather than following a conventional exhibition design plan. After trying several versions of the art presentation, we finally settled on the final presentation on which everyone agreed. These print works were not displayed and classified according to history, age, nationality, or even medium or style, but rather related to each other intuitively. The exhibition presentation resulted from our teamwork, not from a curatorial approach based on a single curator. Collaborative curation is an initial approach to developing and transforming interaction design based on exhibition production.

I learned that collaborative curatorial practice requires more communication and shared creativity. However, I found that the role of the artist-curator encounters different creation issues in exhibition production. For example, what is the best way to balance the relationship between artists and curators? If the exhibition as a whole becomes an art form, who owns or shares the authorship of the exhibition? When does the exhibition production end, and how can artists and curators extend the exhibition through different publications and promotions? What is the difference between curation and artistic creation?



Figure 8

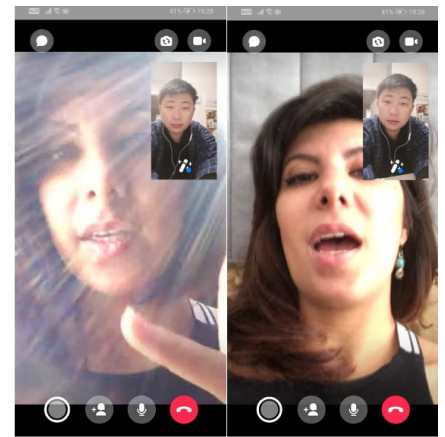


Figure 9

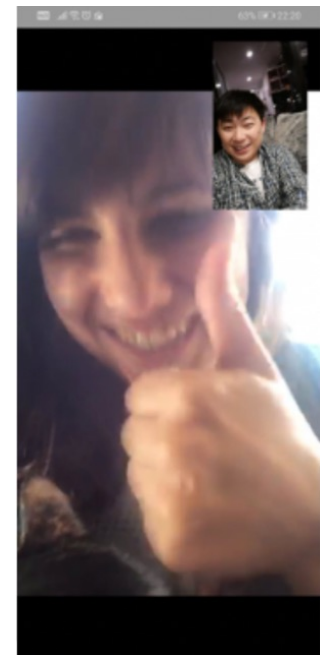


Figure 10

Figure 8: I AM that I AM was exhibited at the Sanshang Contemporary Art Museum  
 Figure 9 - 11: Screenshots of online discussion with Spanish co-curator Estefanía Salas between Melbourne, Australia and Valencia, Spain

These questions made me reconsider some of the fundamental issues of curation. Curating requires collaboration not only within the art world but also across media at different levels. For today's artists, 'curation' may be an excellent extended practice, because it promotes the idea of an experimental process, that is, a laboratory where artists and curators can generate new ideas. As suggested by Ciara Phillips, a Canadian and Irish experimental printmaker, exhibition spaces can be turned into a collaborative environment. In her printmaking project *Workshop* (ongoing, 2010), Phillips initiated a dialogue about artistic creation through the act of co-creating prints. As Phillips pointed out, 'this [co-creation/curation] happens best when the group has a shared identity... [I]t's also important that [the group] wants to connect with me' (Kalos, 2018). Similarly, in my *Out of the Matrix 3.0* exhibition, I aimed to communicate with artists from different backgrounds through creative dialogue and artistic practices, and establish partnerships in exhibition production to jointly create art and knowledge, to make the functions of artists and curators become a shared practice.

### COLLABORATING ACROSS CULTURES

Following IMPACT10, Harding and I co-curated *Out of the Matrix 2.0*, which was presented at the HKOP gallery in Hong Kong in early 2019. This cultural exchange project included a two-week exhibition, an artist residency programme, and public workshops, and it aimed to promote contemporary Australian prints in Hong Kong. The exhibition showcased the print works of eight Australian artists, Marian Crawford, Andrew Gunnell, Richard Harding, Clare Humphries, Ruth Johnstone, Rebecca Mayo, Jonas Ropponen, and Andrew Tetzlaff. At that time, Harding and I were examining the concept of 'producers' for print exhibitions and intended to implement collaborative development through collaborative curatorial methods. This implementation reminded me again of the idea of 'workshop' in printmaking practice. Harding (2019, p. 33) said: 'Print workshops around the world generally responded to philosophies of a collective, or to notions of community that transcend individual needs yet also cater to an individual effort or approach of making'. Through the discussion with Harding, I began to re-examine my position in curatorial practice and reconsider my work in cross-cultural exhibitions. During our collaboration, Harding mentioned that my curatorial role seems to have shifted from art curator to producer of the entire art exhibition event/program.

In American artist Sharon Loudon's book *The Artist as Culture Producer: Living and Sustaining a Creative Life* (2017), she showed that more than forty artists have successfully expanded their practices beyond the studio and become agents of change in the community. These artists became culture producers. Her book illustrates how contemporary artists can increase creativity in society through collaboration, and how this might contribute to the well-being of others. Swiss art curator Hans Ulrich Obrist also suggested that a curator does not merely fill in space with objects but rather is a person who 'brings different cultural spheres into contact' (Obrist 2014, p. 24). I agree that as artist-curators, we should expand our practice beyond the exhibition space. Through further community collaboration and interactive dialogue, we can put

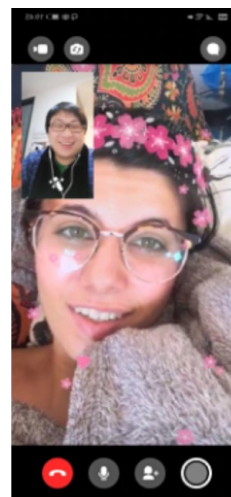


Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14

Figures 9-11: Screenshots of online discussion with Spanish co-curator Estefanía Salas between Melbourne, Australia and Valencia, Spain  
 Figures 12-15: A series of improvisation exercises were carried out during the installation process.

forward ideas and collaboration methods with art practitioners of different backgrounds during the exhibition. By elevating the role of the artist-curator to a potential 'cultural producer', I have opened up my thinking on contemporary art curation and exhibition practice and found a new form of artistic creation.

During the curating process of the *Out of the Matrix 2.0*, Harding and I found that the critical issues in developing cross-cultural art projects are closely related to our roles as curators. Interestingly, given the potential of curators as cultural producers to develop effective communication and collaboration, we thought that there was potential to create a borderless space between different arts and cultures. Promoting the value of curatorial discourse and collaborative practice in art exhibitions is not about finding quick solutions. On the contrary, various art and cultural producers have carefully developed a more in-depth exchange and innovative insights through collaboration and discussion. In this sense, the transition from individual practice to collaborative practice will become a new creative method for contemporary art production.

## CONCLUSION

The evolution from artist to curator is one of the most important developments in my printmaking practice. This turning point provided me with an opportunity to explore the process of transforming two-dimensional prints into three-dimensional printmaking installations. The change of role allowed me to collaborate in the curating of print exhibitions and expand my artistic practice to exhibition collaboration. The methods I used in exhibition-making included establishing curatorial dialogue and improvisation. For instance, as we saw in the *Out of the Matrix 3.0* exhibition, I used my strengths as an artist-curator to experiment with different art practitioners in collaborative curatorial practice. These collaborative practices enabled me to re-examine my identity and work as an artist-curator in artistic creation and curatorial practice, especially in cross-cultural art exhibitions. The reflection on the potential of curators as cultural producers not only brought new ideas in the art field but also supplied me with new ideas about artistic collaboration in different cultures. By collaborating with different artists and curators, I realised that the critical elements of 'printmaking in the post-printing era' could be adjusted from individual practice to collaborative practice. Cultural producers will play the role of creating free and open collective space and provide more new ways of collaboration for print exhibitions.

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Figure 15

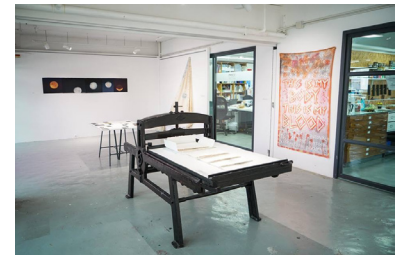


Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

Figure 16: *Out of the Matrix 2.0* exhibition at HKOP Gallery in January 2019  
 Figures 17-18: The local audience participated in *Out of the Matrix 2.0* exhibition  
 Figure 19: Andrew Gunnell demonstrating screen-printing with Wilson Yeung in the HKOP printing workshop, 2019

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Wilson Yeung Chun Wai is an artist-curator, researcher and creative producer. Wilson is currently a PhD candidate at School of Architecture and Urban Design and a member of Contemporary Art, Society and Transformation (CAST) Research Group at RMIT University in Australia. From 2018 to 2020, Wilson has been selected to participate in the Curatorial Intensive of Independent Curators International, the Shanghai

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Curator Lab of the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and the Curators' Intensive of the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in Sydney. Wilson's special interest lies in collective curatorial practices and Asian contemporary art in an Australian context. His PhD research 'Curating in Between' focuses on exploring the role of curators and curatorial practices to develop collective curatorial strategies and frameworks. This practice research articulates curatorial practice that interrogates the role of a curator in facilitating cross-cultural collaborations as a 'cultural collaborator'.

Wilson's works and research have been presented nationally and internationally, including IMPACT 9, 10 & 11, Jogja Biennale, Shenzhen Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture, Pingyao International Photography Festival, Hong Kong Heritage Museum, Ox Warehouse Macau, Ballarat International Foto Biennale, Fine Art Asia, AAANZ Conference, OnCurating, International Academic Forum Archive, Journal of Public Space, Royal Photography Society, etc.

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## IMAGE GALLERY



### Figure titles and information

Figure 1: *I AM that I AM* (2014) by Wilson Yeung. pinhole photograph and monotype, 210 x 297mm

Figure 2: The process of creating print works between the RMIT University campus and Print Studio



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Figure 3: The process of creating print works between the RMIT University campus and Print Studio

Figure 4: A pinhole photograph



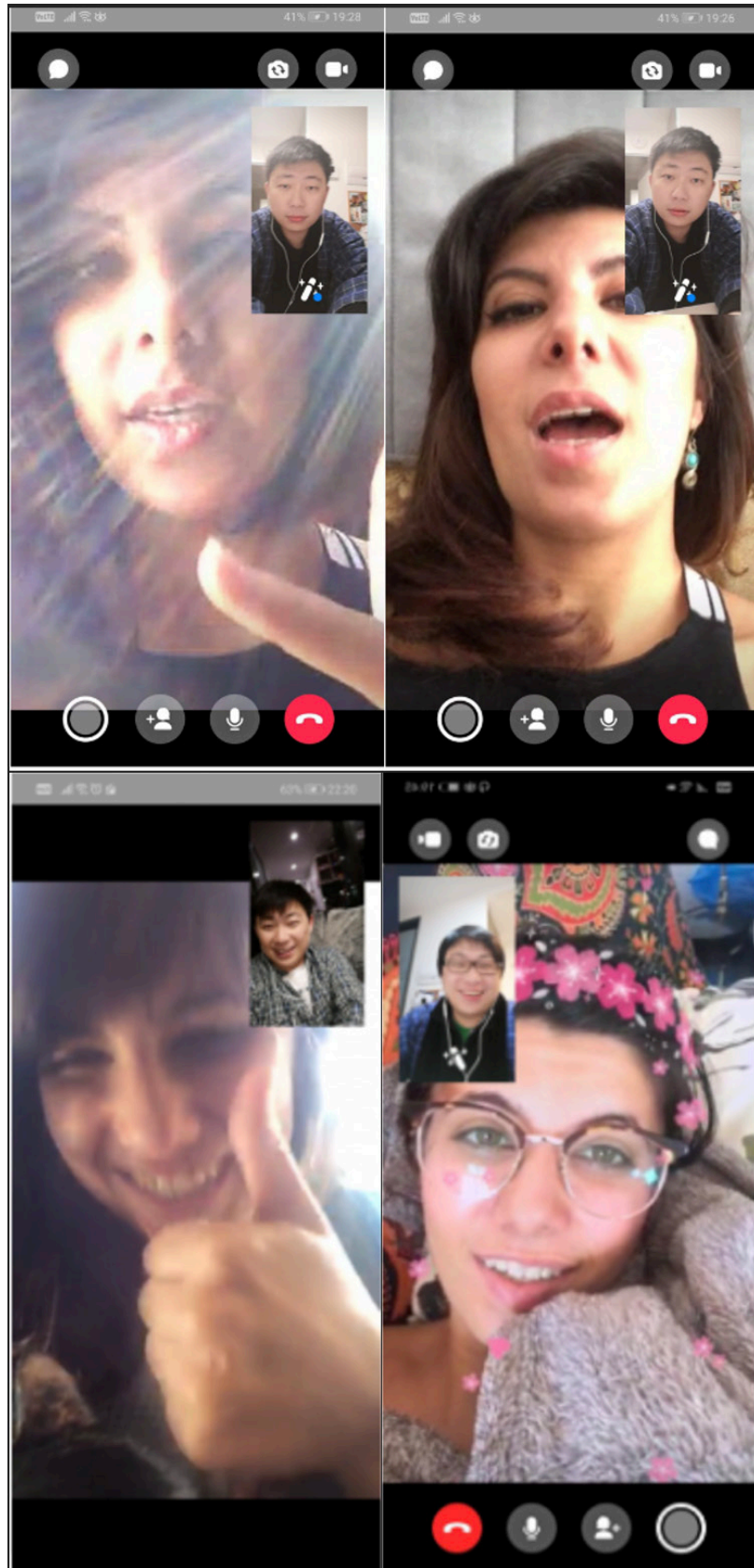
Figure 5: A monotype

Figure 6: A combined image



Figure 7: Youtube video of the exhibition *Trace*  
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Figure 8: *I AM that I AM* was exhibited at the Sanshang Contemporary Art Museum



Figures 9-11: Screenshots of online discussion with Spanish co-curator Estefanía Salas between Melbourne, Australia, and Valencia, Spain.



Figure 12: A series of improvisation exercises were carried out during the installation process

Figures 13: A series of improvisation exercises were carried out during the installation process



Figures 14: A series of improvisation exercises were carried out during the installation process

Figure 15: A series of improvisation exercises were carried out during the installation process



Figure 16: *Out of the Matrix 2.0* exhibition at HKOP Gallery in January 2019

Figures 17: The local audience participated in *Out of the Matrix 2.0* exhibition





Figure 18: The local audience participated in *Out of the Matrix 2.0* exhibition

Figure 19: Andrew Gunnell demonstrating screen-printing with Wilson Yeung in the HKOP printing workshop, 2019