

THE PATH IS THE
GOAL



In the extraordinary
universe of Ho Siu Kee

By Giusi Daniele

“A human being is a part of the whole,
called by us the ‘Universe’” Albert Einstein



(Previous page)
SEMI-COMPLETENESS,
2015, performance,
sculptural installation
and sand, installation
view as part of the
exhibition “Body
Geometry” at Cattle
Depot Artist Village,
Hong Kong, 2015.



Ho Siu Kee (b. 1964) is a well-known conceptual artist in Hong Kong. He sculpts, creates installations and enacts performances, often integrating all three activities with large-scale constructions, readymade objects, sound and light. In his artistic presentation, he frequently adopts the mediums of photography and video.

In the early 1990s, Ho sculpted under Cheung Yee (b. 1936), who was then the chairman of the Department of Fine Arts at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and one of the pioneers of contemporary art in the city. After absorbing Cheung’s artistic vision and sculptural technique, Ho continued his studies abroad, acquiring an MFA in the United States and then a DFA in Australia.

Ho’s rich cultural background, which profoundly influences his artistic attitude and skills, has constantly nourished an authentic quest to understand the meaning and purpose of existence. He cultivates an incredible sense of curiosity that takes him across materiality, geometrical concepts, philosophical notions, fragments of poetry, scientific theories, cosmological traditions, mythological legends and popular beliefs.

Drawing from traditional Chinese thought—the result of syncretic cultural interactions spanning millennia—the core of Ho’s artistic practice emphasizes the human being, in terms of both flesh and spirit. He confers particular attention to the interconnectedness of energy that flows, links and transforms the individual, and believes that the same energy’s transfer can affect all phenomena in the world.

Thus, Ho describes his concept of art by saying, “The artistic process is the real artistic expression which does not reside in the final artwork nor in the concept symbolized in form.” This vision of art can be compared to an idea that exists in religious and spiritual traditions found in many cultures—it is not our destination that provides the most substantial meaning, but the experiences that we gather from the journey itself.

This experiential interpretation leads him to the investigation of the artistic potential of his own body, which inspires his actions and is the core element in all of his work.

He amplifies the physical and sensual experience of his body, which he describes as something that “sculpts itself during the artistic process.” For Ho, the human body is a permanent model that elaborates the form and content of his sculptures and installations.

In the early stages of Ho’s artistic practice, the body serves as a central subject of philosophical and spiritual exploration. The artist melds Chinese philosophical concepts with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1908–1961) phenomenologist theories on perception. This theoretical framework manifests in artworks that express Ho’s deep awareness of body identity.

(Opposite page and this page)
AUREOLA NO. 4 – A PLACE FOR THE MIND, 2009, part of series “Aureola,” 2009–, steel construction and light. All images courtesy the artist.

The artist conceives hollow sculptures as vehicles for his corporeal existence. These display partial body shapes so as to signal the figure’s absence. At times, during live performances, Ho enters the sculptures so that they embody his physical presence.

His performances require incredible self-discipline, which Ho has developed through intense training of both body and mind. The artist does not mention pain in his work, but makes references to the history of torture and corporal punishment as forceful examples of the constrained figure. His purpose is to test, explore and understand his own intimate body-mind experience as an interconnected system of physical and mental perceptions, sensations and emotions.

Ho’s creations over the past seven years seem to reflect what he defines as “an attempt to achieve a physical and mental balance, and a quest to research salvation.” In his practice, he has sought to explore the limitations of and liberation from constraints both tangible and intangible.

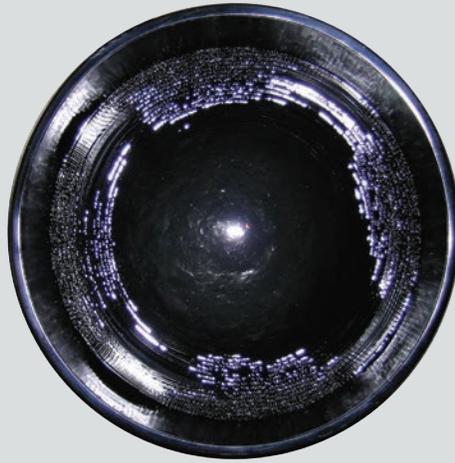
Gradually, the artist has become a spiritual man influenced by Buddhism and Taoism, as well as aspects of animism that can be found in these spiritual systems and other religious traditions around the world. Ho explains that spirituality differs from religion in that the former is not dogmatic by nature, but offers a natural experience allowing human beings “to transform the self.” In Ho’s spirituality, the artist reveals the grandeur of his truthful nature. In particular, meditation guides his daily life and artistic expression.

Ho maintains a consistent artistic process in the production of empty sculptures and metallic structures, all of which are associated with the domains of his interests. His symbolic and metaphorical language guarantees gravitation toward emptiness and light, or even a broader spiritual dimension. He seeks harmony and peace, and cultivates a mindfulness of the joy he derives from the present moment. Since 2008, the artist has championed the theme of spiritual resonance between human beings and the cosmos. Ho has developed a wider “existential and art vision”; this appears for the first time in his works as the presence of his body confronting the energies of the entire universe.

This becomes apparent in the artist’s ongoing series, “Aureola” (2009–), which is inspired by the halo symbol that exists in many cultures and religions. In this series, Ho investigates the optical perception of energy in the form of light that surrounds deities or sanctified figures, and our history of connecting the phenomenon with meteorological halos found around certain stars. For the artist, these visual occurrences are metaphors for the emanation of inner light and reception of external radiance.







(Opposite page)
SEMI-COMPLETENESS, 2015, performance, sculptural installation and sand, installation view as part of the exhibition “Body Geometry” at Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong, 2015.

(This page, top)
SEMI-COMPLETENESS (detail), 2015, performance, sculptural installation and sand, dimensions variable.

(This page, bottom)
SAND RIPPLES, 2015, performance and sand installation, part of the exhibition “Body Geometry” at Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong, 2015.

Ho treats the radiance of light as an iconography of knowledge and as the visual representation of spiritual illumination. For him, light beams can also suggest transmission of insight by a master and the state of mindfulness.

His recent exhibition “Body Geometry – Works by Ho Siu Kee” in June 2015 in Hong Kong represents another important phase in the increasingly spiritual dimension of his artistic message. Based on his personal visions of geometry, art and spirituality, the artist presented a series of installation works that accompanied performances. A pair of compasses and the impermanence and lightness found in sand linked these works.

Semi-Completeness (2015) is a hymn to inwardness and harmony. For Ho, the body has become “cosmic.” It walks near circular blocks that represent planets in the installation, and exists at the same time between the earth and the sky, reaching out in the universe. By enacting two different actions during this performance, the artist’s body expresses interrelated manifestations: the cosmos exists within him, and he exists within the cosmos.

In a meditative state, the artist first plays the Buddhist instrument called *qing*, which presents itself as a bowl filled with water. According to Tibetan, Indian and Nepalese oral traditions, this bowl was originally made of an alloy of seven metals, representing seven planets of the solar system. Ho’s actions induce ripples within the instrument, and sound is produced. With an assistant, he then uses a compass to slowly trace patterns of semicircular waves on a sandpit full of cylindrical solids that symbolize planets. This area is conceived like a *karesansui* (dry landscape) in Japanese Zen gardens—a reference to the cosmos evoked in the Eastern Garden of one of Kyoto’s Zen Buddhist temples, Tofuko-ji. This exceptional garden



is a creation of Shigemori Mirei (1896–1975), a Japanese scholar who is regarded as one of the most celebrated creators of Zen gardens in the 20th century.

These two activities generate resonance in resonances. The sound vibrations and fluctuations of the water ripples emitted by the *qing* are in resonance with the sand waves, which represent plowed soil. The artist says, “They are, at the same time, in resonance with the orbits of planets in the cosmos.” The same idea of resonance is further elaborated in *Sand Ripples* (2015), in which Ho draws circles directly on the sand with a pair of large compasses. In this work, Ho makes a reference to *The Ancient of Days* (1794) by English poet and painter William Blake (1757–1827).

Semi-Completeness and Sand Ripples fuse aesthetic purity, conceptuality and spiritual values. Ho combines Leonardo da Vinci’s vision of the body in relation to machines, basic geometrical concepts, figures that carry universal symbolism, Zen notions and aesthetics, the Taoist concepts of *yin* and *yang*, and corporeal postures for seated and walking meditation.

In *Sand Cone* (2015), Ho creates two conical sculptures of the same size. The first is built with sand using a compass-like device. The second cone is a hollow metal sculpture suspended directly above the first at the end of the performance such that their vertices are aligned. Cone shapes, as the Scottish anthropologist James George Frazer (1854–1941) has suggested, can express the image of evolving matter ascending toward the spirit. This performance can also be interpreted as a new element in the “Aureola” series: the metal cone is a permanent halo, while the sand cone embodies impermanence.

Ho Siu Kee’s message goes beyond his personal spiritual path. For the artist, harmony is a state of resonances and a source of joy. Ho emphasizes the role of meditation in attaining harmony, when speed, competition and profit define human activity in today’s world. Technological efficiency has eclipsed nature. And yet, the artist reminds us that the cultivation of our true nature is essential. As long as we follow the artist’s guidance, the body and mind will be united.



SAND CONE, 2015, performance, sculptural installation and sand, installation view as part of the exhibition “Body Geometry” at Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong, 2015.

Burger Collection, Hong Kong, generously supported the 2015 exhibition “Body Geometry – Works by Ho Siu Kee,” and the artist’s monograph entitled *Mind/Body/Things*, to be published in 2017.

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