



Three-dimensional Memory

by Mandy Chung

A photo is a two-dimensional (2-D) image capturing a moment in time while a model is a three-dimensional (3-D) figure forming a tangible structure. Now we can combine them and get a tangible memory.

Fotomo is a new art form combining the concepts of photography and modelling. It was invented by a Japanese photographer Itozaki Kimio, in the late 1980s. The trend came to Hong Kong after Kimio held an exhibition at the Hong Kong Arts Centre in 2004.

The exhibition made a great impression on secondary school art teacher Alexis Ip Ka-wai, who now teaches Fotomo to secondary school students in his visual art classes.

Ip's innovation was to modify Fotomo so that it would be easier for secondary students to make Fotomo objects.

"What Itozaki Kimio does is making a real 3-D model by cutting parts of the photo and folding them up. It means that you have to take care of all four sides of the object. Students may encounter difficulties in making such a model," he said.

Ip's version of Fotomo is much simpler. "After using one photo as the base, you need to add a few more copies on top of it. You can create a 3-D image by using cardboard between different layers according to the distance of the objects inside the photo."

Ip said Fotomo makers using his method only have to pay attention to the front side. Most of his students can complete a Fotomo in just two to three weeks.

"My students always find Fotomo quite time-consuming and have slight grievances at the beginning. But after finishing the product, they are really excited and have great sense of fulfilment," he added.

Fotomo's Hong Kong pioneer said taking photos is the first and foremost step for making an aesthetic Fotomo. Therefore, makers should try to search for a good theme which matches and fully utilises the characteristics of Fotomo.

"The more complex and detailed the composition of a street you can

capture, the more layers you can work on and the better the 3-D effect you can achieve," he explained.

As most of the old districts in Hong Kong have streets with these characteristics, Ip always finds elements for his works in them. More importantly, he also considers Fotomo as a perfect medium for keeping tangible memories.

He recalls that he once made a Fotomo of a noodle stall in Wanchai which had closed down due to the recession, right after he finished his project.

This made Ip even more determined to preserve the precious memories and history of Hong Kong for the whole community through this new art form.

"People may find some conventional buildings or everyday scenes prosaic and neglect their existence. However, we will definitely miss them if they disappear."

Apart from teaching at schools, Ip was invited by the Hong Kong Architecture Centre to hold a series of Fotomo workshops, exhibitions and talks last August, hoping this would arouse the public's interest in our disappearing old streets.

Arron Chan Tak-ming, a 22-year-old project officer of the Hong Kong Architecture Centre, agreed that Fotomo was a good medium to express the unique quality of old neighbourhoods.

He also said that Fotomo can help people to appreciate the diversity and delicate details found in the shops



Alexis Ip Ka-wai (in red clothes) and his students smile happily with their own Fotomo.

in old neighborhoods. This can also make people realise the relationships between them and their surroundings.

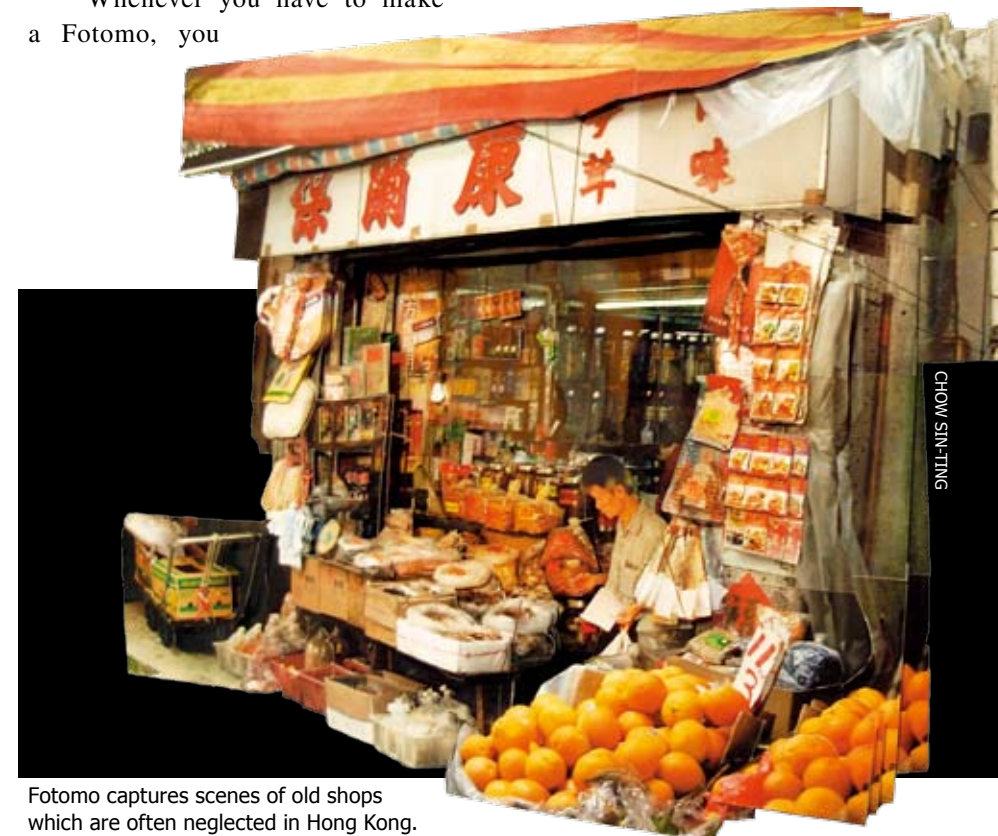
With Ip's assistance and guidance, participants in the workshops learnt enthusiastically. One of them, Nicole Chong Pak-ling said she enjoyed the hands-on experience of making Fotomo.

More importantly, the assistant bank manager said she thought the technique was useful to her work.

"Whenever you have to make a Fotomo, you

need to understand the subject thoroughly first and of course different angles should be taken into consideration too. Therefore, it can train your observation, imagination and concentration," she said.

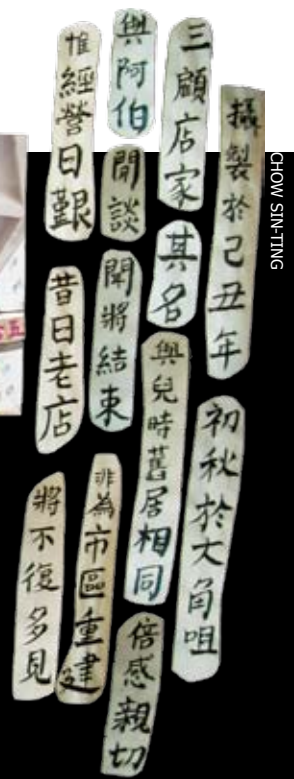
Apart from the 3-D model, Chong also creatively incorporated some Chinese writing in her artwork to further express her own feelings and the story behind them.



Fotomo captures scenes of old shops which are often neglected in Hong Kong.



This little grocery in Tai Kok Tsui has a deep connection to Nicole Chong Pak-ling's childhood.



CHOW SIN-TING

For her Fotomo, she picked a grocery store in Tai Kok Tsui, a district which has both modern and traditional scenes. In order to get an in-depth understanding, she chatted with the store owner several times.

Chong said she felt a deep connection with the store because it looked like the shop near her childhood home, so she wanted to keep a memory of it.

Another participant Daphne Lau Siu-wai, a 21-year-old Communication Design student at the City University of Hong Kong, also showed great curiosity and interest in making Fotomo.

"I have spent almost a whole week to finish my Fotomo but I think it is definitely worthwhile and I can't wait to start another one! I'm thinking of inviting someone to be the subject of my next Fotomo."

Lau said she will recommend Fotomo to her friends because the process of making them is challenging enough to give people satisfaction and achievement. And the skills involved are very useful to art students like herself.

With its ability to combine the realism of photography with the texture of sculpted models to bring images to life, Fotomo shows a sharp contrast to normal 2-D photos.

In September, Hongkong Land presented a series of historic 2-D photos and Fotomo artworks of modern scenes in an exhibition in Exchange Square, showing the development of Central from the 1800s to the urban centre it is today.

Bernice Yeung Yip-ming, a 55-year-old lecturer of Industrial Design with over 20 years' experience of taking photos, was one of the exhibition viewers. He said he appreciated the display very much and wanted to try his hand at Fotomo if he can find the time.

"I have never heard of Fotomo before but I do think Fotomo is very innovative as a new art medium. The handiwork is extremely delicate, so it can express more fine details of the real-world scenes than the ordinary 2-D photo," he added.

But some photography enthusiasts pointed out the limitations of the form. Chiu Ka-kit, a 24-year-old part-time studio photographer said the advantages of Fotomo could only be fully appreciated in making objects with certain themes, like old districts with lots of details and layers.

Sham Chun-pan, a model fanatic with 10 years' experience of making different kinds of paper models, held a similar view.

Despite his personal appreciation of Fotomo, he said the format is repetitive and limited compared to paper models. "Almost everything can be transferred to be a paper model but not Fotomo."

Sham thinks Fotomo may lack the potential to become a common and popular hobby in Hong Kong. But for Ip and those he has inspired, Fotomo remains a welcome art form in preserving tangible memories. **N**



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The exhibition by Hongkong Land presented modern scenes of Central.