



CALVIN SIT

# Lee du Ploy

Artpologist

HONG KONG  
PROFILE

"I don't know what art therapy is. I've never done art therapy," declares Lee du Ploy, as he settles into an armchair in the eclectic surrounds of ZZHK, the gallery he originally founded in London and later relocated to Sheung Wan.

But if he's not an 'art therapist', where does the label come from? For years, du Ploy worked in his own and other people's clinics, both here in Hong Kong and in Europe. "My years of academia had left me rather blunted... Fortunately I always had a gallery or was involved in art, even when I ran the clinic." Eventually, du Ploy decided to combine the two. "By looking at [patients'] drawings I can translate what it is that [the clients] mean." Du Ploy explains that many years ago it was noticed that 'if very ill people were given something creative to do they often became better'. This remains a relatively new concept in Hong Kong. Trying not to focus on colour to determine how a person is feeling, du Ploy looks more into the shapes and letters that his clients use. This form of therapy, he elucidates, is 'just a person's way of explaining what they subconsciously think without realising'.

Surrounded by walls laden with portraits, du Ploy goes on to explain that, although he is both an artist and a therapist, he thinks of himself more as an 'artpologist'. It's his way of attempting to apologise for what he calls 'people's stupidity' in buying conceptual art for material gain. In a society where money talks, where physical and emotional wellbeing often comes at a price, du Ploy is both therapist and an art lover, attempting to use his talents for good.

Born and raised in South Africa, du Ploy discovered his love of art through his 'very eccentric mother'. "She had an obsession with being a part of the French aristocracy," he recalls. Arguably, this is where his fascination with the mind began. Despite a passion for art, it was the mind that he went on to study. His academic journey took him first to the prestigious Sorbonne University, Paris, where he studied

modern psychology. He then became involved with Excerpta Medica, a medical communications agency with offices around the world, working as a researcher and translator.

Currently, du Ploy is looking more into what he describes as the 'Chinese disease', known in Cantonese as *mo loi sing*. This, he claims, is a state of being whereby we 'simply permit ourselves to follow because others do. We become the crowd'. It's no secret that our city is fast-paced, but du Ploy also claims that 'stress is one of the contributing factors to illnesses in Hong Kong'. "Why do people so aggressively push the 'close the door' button in lifts?" he questions. "More often than not the button is computerised anyway, so it's futile to push... why waste the energy? Ultimately, it's about being in control."

As an artist himself, du Ploy uses 'any sort of lap sap [rubbish]' to create his pieces and his gallery is a reflection of this. Bits of disused crates hang from the ceiling, an old Saatchi catalogue forms the shade of a lamp, while life-sized collages hang on the walls. Though he has a penchant for collecting bits and bobs, his real talent lies in portraiture, which is anything but lap sap. Though his patients have a chance to get creative, they are often

also the subjects of du Ploy's own work. One of his most striking pieces depicts a 'patient' – a young albino boy from Malawi wearing bright green contact lenses contributed by du Ploy. "Sometimes it's not what we see but how we assume others see us, how they judge us that is important," remarks the self-professed artpologist. "The albino boy had been pursued, persecuted all his life." He explains that giving him the contact lenses had a number of great advantages, 'changing his appearance, changing how he saw the world, and how the world sees him. Ultimately, you are only unhappy because you assume that you need more than you've got'.

Hannah Hodson

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