



Ms. Ho (first name withheld), 14, said she was putting up a made-up character representing "dirty cops" on the outskirts of the wall in Tai Po. "I want people to know that the cops are like this, that they don't care about people, and don't help people, and hit us."

Post-it note protests

Hong Kong's Lennon Walls offer bright messages of resistance against Beijing's tightening grip

LAUREL CHOR Contributing writer

All over Hong Kong, a colorful form of peaceful protest has been blossoming. People have been writing their thoughts, demands and encouragement onto Post-it notes, and sticking them onto walls in public spaces, creating an eye-catching and instantly recognizable mosaic.

They've bloomed on walls of footbridges and pedestrian tunnels, and on the sides of government buildings and highway pillars, with some torn down as quickly as they flowered, and others having lasted since early June.

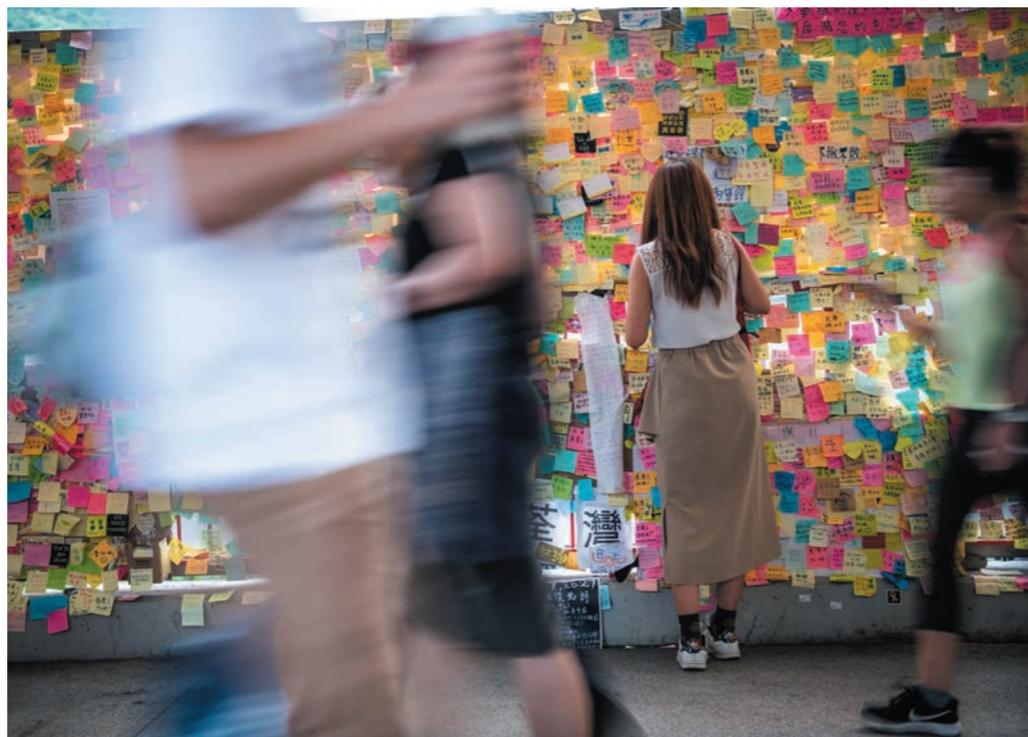
These temporary installations are called Lennon Walls, taking their name from the graffiti-covered, peace-themed wall in Prague first painted with a picture of the late musician John Lennon in 1980.

The first Hong Kong Lennon Wall appeared on the sides of the legislature in 2014, during the pro-democracy Umbrella Movement, when major streets were occupied in the heart of the city for 79 days. Five years later, they have again become a powerful symbol in the former British colony, which has been rocked by almost two months of increasingly violent demonstrations.

The protests were sparked by a proposed bill that would allow anyone in Hong Kong to be extradited back to mainland China, while the police



Wallace (last name withheld) wrote a note supporting Hong Kongers and criticizing the police for their lack of response during triad attacks: "I've lived in Hong Kong for 51 years," he said. "I've never heard of police stations shutting their gates!"



People walk past a woman as she writes a note for a Lennon Wall on a pedestrian overpass in Tsuen Wan.

Far right: A man looks at a Lennon Wall on the side of a highway pillar on Hill Road in Sai Ying Pun.



have continued to stoke public anger. The Hong Kong police force has been criticized for an excessive use of force and, more recently, has been accused of working with the triads, Hong Kong's organized crime syndicates.

The major marches -- two of which have been attended by more than 1 million people, according to organizers -- attract a broad spectrum of Hong Kong citizens. But the street protests are usually attended by younger people and they often end in clashes with the police, who have regularly used tear gas and rubber bullets.

The Lennon Walls provide a gentle alternative for those who may not be willing or able to attend the protests, and who choose to express their views anonymously and quietly.

A small group of anonymous volunteers has embarked on a project called "Lennon Wall Hong Kong" to document the walls on social media, mapping them and collecting images not only from Hong Kong, but around the world. Supporters of the movement abroad have sent photos showing small Lennon Walls that have sprung up all over the world, including Paris, Helsinki, Brisbane and California.

"There is a poetry in a Lennon Wall that captures what has happened in Hong Kong and what makes Hong Kong people special," said a project volunteer, who declined to be identified and who spoke via Instagram's messaging feature. "There is no leader that controls a Lennon Wall. There is no fixed process. Like a garden, each one grows organically. And every single person can contribute. Everyone is helpful."

Crystal, who declined to give her last name, is unemployed and has been spending a lot of time as a volunteer at the largest of the city's Lennon Walls. The Tai Po edition is an impressive public display of creative expression that has completely covered the walls of a pedestrian tunnel hundreds of feet long. Like at other walls, there are supply



Top: A Lennon Wall has taken over the pedestrian overpass by a train station in Tsuen Wan.

Below: A 5-year-old boy writes a note supporting Hong Kongers with the help of his mother, Victoria (last name withheld). She says she wants to start teaching him at a young age so that he can "distinguish between right and wrong."

stations with free Post-its, tape and pens for the taking.

"I want to do my part and help protect everyone's painstaking efforts. Even if it could get cleared at any moment, that's OK," she said, explaining that she helps to tidy up and manage donated supplies. "I just want to come and help, and do what I can for Tai Po and Hong Kong."

Some walls have been torn down or splashed with ink by those who disagree with the protests. During a pro-police rally, people aggressively tore down the walls on the sides of the legislature, only

for it to spring up again the next day. In late July, I saw a police officer tear down a wall in Yuen Long after protests against the triad attacks turned violent.

Blue, a 21-year-old university student who withheld her last name, said she was taking photos of the large Lennon Wall in a pedestrian tunnel in Tsim Sha Tsui because the walls are "an important part of Hong Kong's history" and she knew they "wouldn't last forever."

She hopes the Lennon Walls will raise awareness among foreigners visiting Hong Kong, calling them a form of "soft power."

"This is a tourist spot, and a lot of people pass through it, so whether people agree with us or not, they will want to read it," she said. "Hopefully we can turn them to our side or make them sympathetic to us."

Stage manager Joyce, 27, who asked not to give her last name, was walking past the Tsim Sha Tsui wall when she decided to do her part. She removed the posters covering signs intended to give directions to pedestrians, and stuck them elsewhere on the wall.

Joyce said that the walls give her hope about the movement. "Sometimes I feel really tired, and I think that I am not doing enough," she said, her voice full of emotion. "But when you walk past a wall, you realize there are actually a lot of people with you." **N**



Perry Dino works on an oil painting on June 12 shortly before being engulfed in tear gas. "It's invaluable," said the artist. "Not many paintings have tear gas as a raw material."

Courtesy of Badiucao and Edward Luper



The special "extradition" issue of Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine received submissions from a lot of young new writers, said editor Tammy Ho.

Ho, a professor of English literature, has called for public submissions of Chinese and English poems by anyone, anywhere, who has found his or her voice in the movement. In late July, a special "extradition" issue for the magazine was published, featuring poems from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, London and elsewhere.

"To our surprise, we have received a lot of submissions by young, beginner writers this time," Ho said. "This is something that they feel strongly about so they are emboldened to write."

Just as ancient Chinese poetry was often used as a medium for subtle, sometimes sarcastic, commentary on the politics of the day, poetry today can double as an unofficial record of current events, "like photographs," according to Ho.

"Poems have the unique ability to propel readers to think differently," Ho said. "The meaning of poems differs every time we revisit them. It's less direct but also very upfront."

To political cartoonist Cuson Lo, protest art is central to the movement's ever-increasing momentum. His cartoons, well-known for their caricatural style and vivid colors, are ubiquitous among the city's Lennon Walls -- footbridges, pedestrian tunnels and other public spaces that people have covered with colorful Post-it notes containing messages of support for the protesters.

These pop-up installations have morphed into mini-art galleries showcasing the work of local artists. "My work is usually found in newspapers and on social media, but after some of my followers put my drawings on Lennon Walls, I feel like I have penetrated a vast new layer of audience," said the popular cartoonist. Lo said these comic-style illustrations have played an important role in the



Michelle Chan

Left: Popular political cartoonist Cuson Lo said the protest movement has helped him reach a vast new audience.

Right: An example of Lo's work

"The City I Live In" – Tammy Ho, July 27, 2019
On weekends, people walk the streets in the fierce sun on the brink of fainting –
grey sweat comes down to their ankles
when a river of heads chants add oil.
At least one in seven people choose to boldly speak a forbidden language of signs, posters, and videos; of hope, metaphors, malls, and proliferating Lennon Walls. The city I live in is no longer only office buildings with glass fronts or identical shops that sell identical things. It is a city of diverse limbs that each know their direction – wherever they are needed, they go.

movement, particularly in raising awareness among those who were once indifferent to politics. "Every passerby, young and old, can easily understand the message," said Lo. "These images are much more contagious than news and texts."

Still, not all creators want their names to appear in these "galleries" at a time when people in the Asian financial hub are under increasing pressure from employers to steer clear of politics. A 25-year-old graphic designer, who would give her name only as Wing, is one of the many anonymous contributors to the protest artwork that has spread across the city.

She and hundreds of other members of Telegram, an anonymous messaging app widely used by protesters, have spent their days and nights creating promotional materials and propaganda for the stream of protest events that have taken



Courtesy of Cuson Lo

Painting with tear gas

How pop-up art and poetry are keeping Hong Kong's protest movement alive

MICHELLE CHAN Nikkei staff writer

HONG KONG When artist Perry Dino set out into the streets on June 12 with a paintbrush and canvas to capture images of Hong Kong's nascent protest movement, he found himself working with an unexpected new material -- tear gas.

The police had fired over 240 rounds of the noxious chemical to disperse the thousands of black-shirted demonstrators who had surrounded the legislature to protest a controversial extradition bill, and Perry, perched on a nearby flyover, was suddenly choking on the poisonous clouds filling the air. It wasn't his safety that he was concerned about, however.

"All that was on my mind was how to protect the canvas. It's invaluable. Not many paintings have tear gas as a raw material," said the 53-year-old.

Dubbed the "be water" movement -- a reference to a mantra made famous by martial arts master Bruce Lee -- the Hong Kong protests are characterized by their speed, adaptability and unpredictability. Amid the unrest, various forms of art have blossomed as the pro-democracy demonstrations enter their 13th week.



Michelle Chan

Perry has been painting images of Hong Kong's protest movements since 2012. His work is not for sale, however, because he does not want it to "fall into the wrong hands."

Perry has been on the front lines of local protest movements since 2012, using his art to portray events ranging from the annual June 4 Tiananmen vigils to the 2014 Umbrella Movement that paralyzed traffic in Hong Kong's central business district for 79 days.

But none of his artwork is for sale. "I fear if my work fell into the wrong hands, our next generation wouldn't be able to see it again," he said.

Week after week, the father of two has witnessed firsthand the increasingly confrontational rallies and rendered into art some of the most dramatic episodes of Hong Kong's largest mass movement since it returned from British to Chinese rule in 1997.

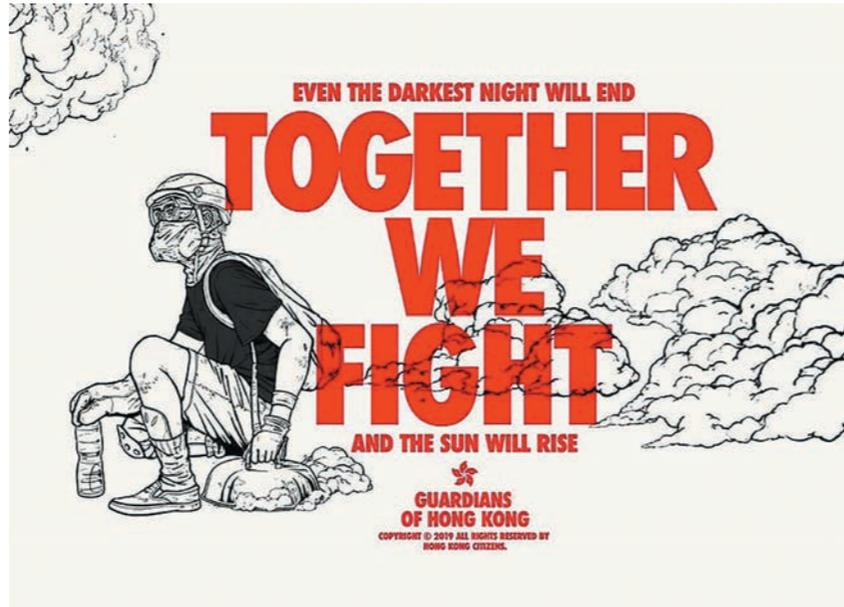
"One day, when we eventually win democracy, I hope my work can be exhibited in museums where our kids can grasp the full picture of what happened," Perry said.

Throughout the summer, Tammy Ho, the editor of Voice & Verse Poetry Magazine, has been writing poems inspired by the series of rallies in the city, and has encouraged others to do the same.



Michelle Chan

Wing, 25, has found an outlet for protest in Telegram, a messaging app that enables her and other graphic designers to distribute their resistance art anonymously.



Via Telegram

place every weekend since early June.

They send out leaflets and posters through Telegram channels -- the largest one currently has about 80,000 subscribers -- and these materials are then shared via social media, handed out on busy streets or affixed to Lennon Walls. To broaden the reach, commuters also distribute flyers via AirDrop, an iPhone function that enables users to share files offline, in subway stations and crowded shopping districts.

The ability to "be water" is shown not only in the fluid way in which protesters spread their messages, but also in how they create the content in the first place. Wing said they design graphics tailored to people from all walks of life, from millennials and baby boomers to expats and mainland tourists.

"We cannot just stay inside the echo chamber," she said. "We must adapt to their tastes in art in order to solicit support from people beyond our social circle."

Public spaces throughout Hong Kong have become pop-up galleries for protest art and messages of resistance.



Michelle Chan

Courtesy of Sampson Wong



Sampson Wong, a scholar who created a "visual archive" for the artwork of the Umbrella Movement, sees the "be water" movement itself as a form of art.

Many locals have described creators like Wing as the movement's "publicity department."

"Some of us are professional designers, some are art students and some are simply amateurs. It's just an open platform where everyone can submit their work," Wing explained. "Collective intelligence is the essence of this leaderless movement. All participants can utilize their expertise and do their part."

For Sampson Wong, who teaches at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, analyzing the protest art has been a headache at times because "the artwork blooms and vanishes every minute." He built the Umbrella Movement Visual Archive to record art pieces that flowered during the mass sit-in five years ago, but he's finding it difficult to do the same this time.

"The philosophy of 'be water' has given rise to short-lived yet powerful artwork, both tangible and intangible," said Wong, citing examples of pop-up street graffiti, hand signals invented by protesters to communicate in the field, and how protesters respond when hostile passersby destroy Lennon Walls: They stick memos onto their clothes and turn themselves into "mobile Lennon Walls" instead.

"Art is the process of breaking rules and innovating new ideas," Wong said. "In this sense, the protest itself is already a form of art to me." **N**



Song of solidarity

How 'Glory to Hong Kong' -- a new work by an anonymous composer -- became the anthem of a protest movement

KEN SMITH Contributing writer

HONG KONG You can gauge a lot about a revolution from its soundtrack. Along with boycotts, blockades and human chains, group singing has been a part of Hong Kong's protest movement since it erupted on June 9 when more than a million people took to the streets over a proposed anti-extradition law.

As protesters' demands have evolved, so too has the playlist. Early on, Christian groups had countered tear gas and rubber bullets with the hymn "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord." Then came "Do You Hear the People Sing?" from the musical *Les Misérables*, a chorus about a historical uprising; it had been a favorite during the 2014 pro-democracy Umbrella Revolution. This song returned both in protest rallies and as a rejoinder to the Chinese national anthem at soccer matches and school gatherings.

But the movement scored its first original hit with "Glory to Hong Kong," a hymn-like melody soon known simply as the Anthem. Its anonymous creator, a self-proclaimed pop

songwriter identified as "Thomas dgx yhl," posted the piece in an online forum on Aug. 26; forum members began suggesting changes, many of which were incorporated into the text.

Within five days, a music video using protest footage from television and social media hit YouTube and quickly went viral, before being taken down by a claim of copyright infringement.

"During these times everyone felt the need to sing something," says Leon Chu, director of the Chinese University of Hong Kong Chorus, "and the Anthem just appeared at the damn right time to fill the gap."

Chu had witnessed the emotional power of group singing in late July at the Taipei International Choral Festival. After his chorus's performance of "Below the Lion Rock," which recalls a popular 1970s television series about working-class Hong Kong, audience members at Taiwan's National Concert Hall unfurled bilingual banners exclaiming "HK Add Oil!", a popular Hong Kong expression of support. It took several minutes for the singers to regain composure.

But "Lion Rock," Chu says, is hardly an enduring choice as protest music: "After a while, most pop songs just became a joke. People hear the first few words and say, that song again?" The Anthem's chief strength, he says, is that it aims higher than mere nostalgia.

Thomas, the composer, has told reporters that he was looking "to unite people and boost morale," so he modeled his piece on several national anthems as well as 18th-century Italian composer Antonio Vivaldi's choral works. He started with his final line -- translated as "May people reign, proud and

Demonstrators sing "Glory to Hong Kong" -- the unofficial anthem of the protest movement -- at the International Finance Centre shopping mall on Sept. 12.



free" -- and then worked backward.

In Hong Kong, a former British territory with a long history of church-affiliated education, the Anthem's hymnic style proved supremely approachable.

Frederick Lau, head of Chinese University's music department, sees it a bit differently. "The real irony," he says, "is that the Anthem heavily resembles the songs that Chinese communists once used against the capitalists." Lau has been commissioned to include the Anthem in the Oxford Book of Protest Music, to be published later this year.

"One reason for the Communists' success in the 1920s and 1930s was the way they wielded group songs as a 'weapon of the people,'" Lau says. "There was always some perceived invisible power, some anti-hegemony built in."

Hong Kong's Anthem fully became part of the protesters' nonviolent arsenal only after a slickly produced video emerged, with a series of haunting images of a full orchestra and chorus dressed in black and wearing oxygen masks.

Suddenly, this was no slapdash rendering of a crowdsourced tune, but rather a fully orchestrated statement in four-part harmony -- a clear professional proclamation from Hong Kong's classical music and film communities.

"When I first heard the piece in the forum, I consciously chose it over the other songs protesters were singing," says the video's producer, identifying himself only as "S." "It was the one least like a pop song and most like an anthem in tempo and structure. Pop songs are all about individual expression. Anthems are meant to unite."

A decadelong veteran of Hong Kong's classical music circles, S took advantage of a citywide strike on Sept. 5 to contact local musicians and singers. Within 48 hours, more than 200 performers

A musical flash mob plays "the Anthem" in a shopping mall in the city's Kowloon Tong district on Sept. 18.



Getty Images



The song's anonymous composer says he modeled his piece on several national anthems as well as the choral works of 18th-century Italian composer Antonio Vivaldi.

offered their services for an orchestration sketched by a local Ph.D. composition candidate.

A quick call to a filmmaking colleague yielded a 10-person camera crew who supplied their own equipment. The film shoot -- including rehearsals and separate audio recording -- lasted about four hours, with the edited version uploaded two days later on Sept. 11. Within 24 hours, it had generated more than a million views.

The entire process, in short, resembled the decentralized anonymity of the protest movement itself. "It transcended music



Reuters

as either art or commerce," says S, who corresponded with Thomas only through a message board. "It's crazy how much trust was involved. How did I know he was the composer and copyright holder? He could be an undercover cop. I could be a triad. But he trusted that I'd deliver, and I trusted him enough to give him my scores. That would never happen in the real world."

Key details, such as the shoot's time and location, were on a need-to-know basis, but with so many people involved, S took no chances. "I had a team of lawyers present, just in case," he says. "We were all dressed in black, wearing protest gear. The last thing we wanted was to have 150 people beaten up by triads, or to see the police come in with a warrant."

"What is truly depressing," he says, "is that viewers see the smoke machines and instantly recognize it as tear gas. If this video had been made five years ago, people would think we were radicals pushing the limits. Now they accept tear gas and rubber bullets as a regular part of life."

S's biggest fear is that the video could encourage too much positivity. "People might think they're making a difference just by singing," he says. "But people have been caught in a

[A protester plays "Glory to Hong Kong" on a recorder during a march held after the government invoked emergency powers to ban masks at demonstrations.](#)



Getty Images



The face mask has become a symbol of resistance in Hong Kong.

AP

downward spiral of depression, with nine confirmed suicides already. Some young people literally can't go home because of their beliefs. We're just trying to restore the balance. When people sing this piece, they know they're not alone."

Indeed, groups now burst into song on the streets. During Mid-Autumn Festival in September, a few hundred people at Victoria Harbour sang the Anthem while reading the text from their mobile phones. Most singing, though, takes place in shopping malls, where the high ceilings eerily recreate the acoustics of a church.

In the past week alone, copycat videos have included multilingual translations, a transcription for traditional Chinese instruments and a rendition featuring secondary school musicians.

There was even a rival video response, with white-clad musicians and singers -- including pro-Beijing lawmaker Junius Ho -- lip-syncing new lyrics condemning the protests to a shoddy synthesized accompaniment. The video was quickly taken down from YouTube for copyright violations, though the video is still posted on the mainland platform Weibo.

Hong Kong's musical professionals freely acknowledge the Anthem's flaws: clumsy lyrics, a melodic range too wide for most amateur singers -- a fault that four-part harmony helps to hide -- tones in the Cantonese text running counter to the music's melodic contours. But no one argues against its effectiveness.

"Look, it's not Brahms' First Symphony," says S, "but our composer would rather have his piece serve its intended purpose than tick all the boxes. 'Glory to Hong Kong' is probably less successful than any piece ever submitted to a college music department, but it's one of the most successful works Hong Kong has seen in decades." [N](#)