

MELISSA IP AND CARY KWOK

MELISSA: I've never really done an interview before, and I'm not sure if it'll be easier or harder because I already know you, we're friends. I met you through a mutual friend, Wendy Yao, who does the awesome store Ooga Booga. Wendy had told me a lot about you before we met. She spoke highly of your drawings and also of your hair-cutting skills. I officially met you in September 2007 at Nick Relph and Oliver Payne's opening at Gavin Brown. You were wearing a trench coat, and we started talking about Hong Kong, because that is where you grew up and where I have spent time in the past with my family. Do you want to talk a little about growing up in Hong Kong and how you ended up in London?

CARY: My upbringing in Hong Kong was a little oppressive. Back then, Hong Kong was quite a conservative place; you were not really encouraged to be experimental. If you dressed a little different, you'd get looks all the time, or if you listened to music other than Cantopop, you'd be considered weird and pretentious. I guess it's like that everywhere. I didn't get on too well with a lot of people. My family was quite conservative, especially my father's side. They are kinda narrow-minded. I guess I was always trying to rebel in a quiet way. I challenged my family and society by experimenting with clothes. I rebelled against the education system by falling asleep during math lessons. For anyone young and in school reading this interview, it's BAD to fall asleep during classes! Don't do it at school, and maybe, if you're underage, you shouldn't be reading this at all, because it contains explicit adult material. Anyway, I also rebelled against the school "rebels" by not smoking or swearing, but of course, my cousins and I used to swear like crazy at home.

The reason why I left Hong Kong wasn't such a tricky story. I wanted to come to London ever since my early teens. I was a fan of the Smiths, was fascinated by the romance of their images and the lyrics. They kind of formed my impression of England. And all those period dramas I loved to watch, and all those London youth magazines I read as well.

I came to the UK for a three-month holiday in 1994, and I just fell in love with it. After a few months back in Hong Kong, I decided to come back to the UK to study. I'd

applied to Central Saint Martins to study fashion because of [John] Galliano—like a lot of people at the time, I guess. I was at St. Martins all the way from foundation to BA, and I finished with my MA. I had a great time there.

It's safe to say that London is quite different from Hong Kong. I just can't imagine how I would've turned out if I'd never left. Hong Kong is such a money- and business-orientated city, as you know. I think I would've been so frustrated, 'cause there was no space for me to express myself. Of course, I must say I love it there, too. I love its efficiency and convenience. The lack of efficiency in London annoys me. You wait forever just to get something simple done. But the great thing about London is that it gives you space to be creative and expressive. Hong Kong is a bit of a contrast; it's very commercial and mainstream.

And food in Hong Kong is good! You don't often get good Chinese food in the West. I miss Cantonese food in Hong Kong. I love those thin Cantonese noodles with fish dumplings and seaweed, where the skin of the dumplings is made out of fish, and the Dim Sum is so good in Hong Kong. And I love Northern Chinese food, too. I'm not an expert, but my mother's side of the family is Mandarin, and we sometimes go to Mandarin restaurants—there are some good ones in Hong Kong. And you can find good Indian restaurants in Tsim Sha Tsui (Indian/South Asian area) and Central.

MELISSA: I used to go to Hong Kong twice a year to visit my mom and brother, and all I remember doing is eating! Except for this one summer, when I had food poisoning. I have never been to London, though like you, I definitely had an Anglophile past during my teen years. I was obsessed with British youth culture, especially the music.

It is interesting to hear you describe Hong Kong as being a money- and business-orientated city, and as a result, it does not have room for self-expression. In all the times I have visited, no matter how much fun I had, there was something missing. Maybe it is exactly what you said. It's not that creativity doesn't exist there, but that Hong Kong might not necessarily be the kind of the city where it is nurtured or prioritized. At the same time, it is always interesting to see how individuals in more oppressive or difficult environments still find a way to make their art and to be heard. Being forced to go underground can be fuel for great masterpieces! What we do is secret!

I haven't been to Hong Kong since 1997—the big Takeover or Handover, depending on whose side you're on. It will always have a place in my heart because it is the city where I first discovered bubble tea, which has

become an infatuation of mine! I want to hear some of your food recommendations for Hong Kong!

CARY: I really can't imagine how I would have turned out if I had never left Hong Kong. I guess many young people who didn't fit in or who wanted to do creative things have found it easier to leave Hong Kong and study abroad. There are creative people in Hong Kong, but I'm not sure if they're being appreciated or nurtured in the right and positive way. There have been a number of attempts to improve art and design in HK by the government, but somehow the efforts never ended up the way everyone hoped that they should have. I think perhaps they see it more like a business investment. They desperately want instant results and profits, and they tend to give up every time they don't see the results they hope for after a couple of years, and move onto something else. Or those projects often turned into something unrecognizable and commercial after a while.

Also, if I hadn't left, I don't think I would have met all my great friends like you, the NY Queen of Bubble Tea!

MELISSA: How old were you when you started drawing?

CARY: I started drawing as young as I can remember. I used to draw nonstop at home and at school. Every inch of my schoolbooks was covered in my drawings. And I loved drawing on tabloid magazines. I loved giving celebrities makeovers. I still do.

MELISSA: Which celebrities? Cantopop stars, too? I grew up with lots of Cantopop, whether or not I liked it! As a child I watched lots of Hong Kong movies, and as you know, Cantopop stars are all also huge movie stars over there. It goes hand in hand. Were you a fan of Leslie Cheung? He was one of my favorites. R.I.P.

CARY: Whoever needs a makeover, I guess. Yes, Cantopop stars, too. I wasn't such a big fan of Leslie Cheung, but I liked some of his songs. He was very talented, and to a lot of Hong Kongers, he was a legend. It is very sad that he's not with us anymore.

MELISSA: He was, and is, one of the few openly gay Hong Kong celebrities. Did you always want to be an artist? Did you have professional training?

CARY: I was professionally trained to be a fashion designer at Central Saint Martins. I studied footwear design in Hong Kong before moving to London, so I had professional training as a shoemaker, too. But I

was never trained as an artist. It wasn't my intention to be an artist when I was young; I wanted to be a fashion designer. But I guess maybe I was fated to become an artist.

MELISSA: Relating to what you said earlier about London giving you space to be creative and expressive: I've heard that fashion schools in New York tend to focus more on the business aspect of the profession, whereas in London the focus is about the artistic end of it.

CARY: Yes, I heard that fashion schools in New York do focus a lot more on the technical and the business aspects of the industry. I guess it's because you do have a solid industry there in New York, whereas fashion designers in London tend to run small, independent businesses. But I don't think I can comment on other fashion schools in London or in New York. I studied at Central Saint Martins in London; I never went anywhere else. But I know that a lot of talented designers came out of New York.

Saint Martins is a great college that encourages students to be inspired to create and innovate. I learned so much there, especially in doing my MA. I think being away from home and having such a privilege to attend a great art school like Saint Martins gave me an opportunity to grow up and to learn to find myself. I think I would have turned out quite differently if I had never moved to London. I often wonder how I would have turned out if I moved to New York instead.

MELISSA: Every time I travel, I imagine what my life would be like if I lived in the place I was visiting. You have a tattoo of a pen on your arm. What kind of pen is it exactly? Is it a pen that you use to draw with?

CARY: Yes, I have a pen tattooed on my right arm. It's a biro, a ballpoint pen. It is the pen I use to draw. It's done by an amazing tattoo artist named Dan, in New York.

Have you got a tattoo on a secret part of your body that we haven't seen? Nicky once asked if your eye makeup was tattooed on.

MELISSA: Rule number one of a ninja is that we never expose our secrets! Permanent makeup is surprisingly popular among older Chinese ladies. Lots of tattooed eyebrows and eyeliner. There are quite a few spots in Chinatown that could hook it up.

CARY: Maybe I should consider getting mine done, too!

MELISSA: I have noticed that most women with tattooed eyebrows always look surprised or angry. They will look that way forever. Do you work in other mediums? Would you?

CARY: One of my aunts had her eyebrows tattooed and now they've turned blue, but after all these years she still denies they're tattoos, like we can't tell.

I do work in other mediums. I use acrylic and color pencils, too. And I'm thinking of making sculptures and films in the future.

MELISSA: What galleries represent you?

CARY: I'm represented by Herald St in London. And I've had exhibitions at other galleries abroad, too, like my show last year at Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin in Miami.

MELISSA: Didn't they have some sort of warning sign outside of the show in Miami about your drawings?

CARY: Yes, I'm afraid so. It said something like, "Please be advised that the Cary Kwok exhibition contains explicit adult material." I thought it was funny!

MELISSA: How important is it to have a close relationship with your gallerists?

CARY: I do think it is important. It's a mutual, respectful relationship 'cause they need you just as much as you need them. And I'm lucky that my gallerists are amazing. They're a great bunch of people, and we're good friends. I've known them for a few years. We met before they started Herald St, before I started working as an artist.

MELISSA: Did you meet them in school? Now that I think about it, I have never heard the story of how you met Ash and Nicky.

CARY: That was when I just finished college. I officially met Nicky through a mutual friend, Jamie, with whom I went to Saint Martins with and who is now a very talented film director. I think they went to the same school when they were kids. I used to see Nicky around. I knew of him from going out. I used to go to a club night called Nerd, and Nicky was one of the DJs there. I thought he was cute, and I was so nervous when I first spoke to him. Hahaha!

I don't actually remember how I met Ash. I think we met through Nicky. I thought he was pretty hot, too. He looked like a biker with his long hair.

MELISSA: Coming from a pretty conventional Chinese immigrant family, art was not viewed as a viable career option for me. My parents at an early age made it clear to me that art is not practical, and, being a minority in this country, there is almost no chance of me being successful in any creative field.

CARY: Being a minority is always difficult, but sometimes we have our advantages, too. It is harder for us, and we do need to work extra hard or to be a lot better than others to stand out. Sometimes I think we do have a bit of a chip on our shoulders. We Chinese have a history of being victimized and bullied by foreign countries since the nineteenth century. It was somehow due to our arrogance in believing we were still better than others because China was a rich and powerful country for centuries. We didn't even realize the Western world had already started advancing itself and improving on the technology that we originally invented. We were so stuck in the romance of our past, we failed to see the present. And now, because we've been bullied for so long, we are so ingrained with the idea of being underdogs. It's a bit of an inferiority complex, especially among immigrant Chinese. Sometimes it's hard for us to believe in ourselves.

And I think so many Chinese families don't view art as a possible career option for the same reason. Our values are so distorted by all the constant, foreign victimization and invasions and civil wars. Artists in ancient China were very much respected—just look at ancient Chinese art and its influence in the world. But when you're too busy trying to survive, you're not likely to be thinking too much about art. You'd probably want something practical.

MELISSA: My parents were definitely into me being a doctor or a lawyer! Eventually they just gave up. When I was growing up, I was under the impression that art was only art if it was hanging in a museum. The only artists I knew were the likes of Picasso, Van Gogh, or Monet. Was it similar for you growing up in Hong Kong and being Chinese? How does your family view art? Are they supportive of you being an artist? Is your family familiar with your work?

CARY: My father's side of the family is not really interested in art. But my mother's side of the family is very supportive. They may not really understand it, but I think they are quite artistic. My mum used to love to draw. I remember seeing her drawings when I was little, but she never really took it any further. She now reads a lot. And my great-grandmother was very artistic. She used to draw, and she used to make me beautifully intricate Chinese

paper cut-outs. She also would make me stuffed fruits, vegetables, and rabbits out of old pillowcases. And she had bound feet. She said she used to embroider her own lotus shoes. She passed away fourteen years ago. I wonder what she's up to now.

MELISSA: Wow. The Legend of the Bound Feet. I have never met anyone with bound feet. I have seen pictures, though, and the feet become the craziest shapes. The different body parts we choose to fetishize!

CARY: Like women wearing corsets to fit themselves into tiny-waisted dresses. Or getting things implanted into your body. It's pretty scary what we put ourselves through for the sake of our appearances.

MELISSA: But at the same time, it is amazing that we have the ability to physically change any part of our outer shells. We don't have to be stuck in the bodies that we were born with—for better or for worse!

CARY: Yes, we do have a choice, but whether we're brave enough to take action is a different matter. And sometimes there's so much to consider, our responsibilities keep reminding us that we can't just get up and leave.

MELISSA: Let's talk about the subject of your drawings. A personal favorite of mine is one titled *Birth*. I also love *Sperman* and *Here Cums the Spider*. Most of your work features penises and ejaculations. Why is it that men are obsessed with the two? This is regardless of their sexuality.

CARY: Yes, men are. Even straight men are obsessed with other men's penises, or the size of other men's penises.

MELISSA: Women are not obsessed with their vaginas or any other body part in the same way.

CARY: I'm not sure if I believe that. I don't know, maybe you just don't talk about it as much. A lot of my female friends are kinda obsessed with their breast size. I personally think women look better with small breasts; clothes hang better on them.

MELISSA: The grass is always greener! I really like that you inject humor into your work. It is always refreshing when artists aren't too serious, because what is the point if it isn't fun? When did your fascination with drawing well-endowed men and their bodily fluids start? Is there a message that you're trying to send to the viewer?

CARY: Ever since I learned about sex and discovered ejaculation. I remember I was twelve or thirteen, I was working on a porno comic, and I was so proud of it. Halfway through the process of it, I suddenly got very worried. I was so scared to be caught in the middle of drawing my porno, and I didn't want anyone to find out about it. I first hid it, and later I thought the best thing to do was to destroy the evidence. Unfortunately, I didn't manage to finish my dirty comic.

But my work is not just cocks and cum. I often draw hairstyles, shoes, historic and legendary women, and portraits, too. I guess it's easy for people to categorize me as an artist who draws cocks and cum, or because my "erotic" drawings tend to stick in most people's minds more than my other work, 'cause people are obsessively fascinated with sexual imagery. Of course, I always try to say something through my drawings, whether it's simply my sexual fantasy or something deeper and political. Some of my work is sexual and explicit, yet what I want to express does not necessarily have much to do with sex.

I think a lot of my work has subtle resonances about racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender equality to it, with a bit of my sense of humor. I guess I often subconsciously make a point of the differences and samenesses between people of different races and cultures through my drawing, whether it is of hairstyles or sex. And I've always been fascinated by our human sophistication, our ability to build—to build our knowledge, our appearances, our environments, and so on. My "Cum To Barber" series of portraits of men with cum faces, frozen in time, with semen ejaculated onto their own chests, is a bit of an intimate close-up of our human differences, similarities, and shared qualities. The men in the series are of different periods, different racial and cultural backgrounds. The intention of this is not to promote the diversity or segregation of people; my intention was to try and draw people's attention to an unconscious recognition of our similarities and differences regardless of race.

I think my superhero series of drawings is just an extra intimate look at an imaginary, private world of these characters who people usually think of as mythical. I thought it'd be funny to take the audience into their private lives and to bring the heroes down to our human level of desires and needs, such as masturbating. And to imagine what they can do with their penises as people with advanced powers. It's like watching porn. We are so fascinated by the size of porn actors' penises and the volume of their ejaculation. I do think that we almost unconsciously idolize them as superheroes.

MELISSA: Superheroes are the ultimate wet dream! For both men and women! Most superheroes are pretty

nerdy, nondescript, oversensitive guys like Clark Kent or Peter Parker, but with their superpowers they become the ultimate MAN—kicking ass and getting the girls. Superheroes and porn are both about fantasy. I'm sure a porno version of some of our favorite classic superheroes already exist, but if not, you should make one! As a way to replace the dirty comic you destroyed as a child.

CARY: Imagine what superheroes could do. You'd think twice before sleeping with Mr. Kent. I wanna make a new comic. Maybe you should write me a script. It'd be our little collaboration.

MELISSA: I'll get started right away! How do you feel about Tom of Finland? Do you see any similarities between yourself and him? Both of you do homoerotic art. Was he an influence to you?

CARY: Yes, I do like his work. It's beautiful! I first saw it when I was fifteen. I couldn't resist, so I bought a copy and I hid it so well that I don't even remember where the hiding place is.

But I think our messages behind our work are quite different. And his men are very exaggerated. I tend to give my men realistic physiques and penises. I'd like to consider them real-ish! With a gigantic volume of cum, it's kind of hot!

And yes, I guess I'd say in some ways he was an influence to me.

MELISSA: The last time you were in town in New York, you gave Wendy, Amy, and me amazing '60s bouffants that were reminiscent of girl groups like The Ronettes and girl biker gangs. It was better than any hairdresser I had ever been to. Also, at Miami Basel in December 2007, you had a barber's chair set up in your gallery's booth, and you gave out free haircuts. How did this idea come up? Did you ever go to hair-cutting school? Would you ever pursue a career in hair?

CARY: It was fun that night. I love period hairstyles. So much work had gone into them. It was seriously glamorous, even when it wasn't glamorous. The girl biker gang look was so Smiths and romantic.

I think it was Nicky (one of my gallerists) who came up with the idea of me giving haircuts at art fairs. I had such a great time giving haircuts at Miami Basel back in 2007. I would've given you a haircut if it hadn't been so busy.

I never went to hair-cutting school; I'm self-taught.

And no, I don't think I'd pursue a career in hair. But it's funny a lot of people think I used to be a hairdresser. I

can tell you that I've never worked as a hairdresser or a barber, professionally.

MELISSA: In addition to styling hair for fun, you also make drawings with elaborate hairstyles as the subject. I know the interest in hairstyles is because it is clearly a hobby of yours, but I have also noticed that shoes are often featured in your work as well. Why shoes?

CARY: As I said earlier, I studied footwear design and fabrication. So I know the technical side of shoemaking. I love shoes. It's not a fetish thing; they don't turn me on sexually. But I just love beautiful shoes. I can spend hours in shops just looking at shoes. They're like works of art. I've worked as a shoe designer before, too. I not only love to own shoes, I love drawing them, too, and I'd love to have my own shoe label in the future.

MELISSA: I was really hoping you would confess to having some freaky foot obsession. Have you ever looked at ads for foot-fetish models? The jobs pay a couple hundred an hour, and all you have to do is walk around with your toes and feet exposed—nothing else! Well, maybe a foot massage or two.

CARY: Not my kind of thing You know any penis models?

MELISSA: I'm sure you can find some on Craigslist or Manhunt. A while ago you sent out an e-mail looking for a '50s beefcake to use as a model for one of your drawings. Did you find one? How did it work out? Was there nudity involved?

CARY: Yes, I did find one. He wasn't so 1950s-looking, though. He was a little too steroid-buff, but he was good, very pro. And yes, there was of course a lot of full-on frontal male nudity, with a massive erection involved. It was for a life-scale drawing that was shown in Miami.

MELISSA: I have never sat in on an anatomy drawing class, but I am guessing this guy wasn't your typical art-school figure model. Was there a fluffer on set?

CARY: No, but he brought his own penis pump. He was very professionally prepared. And my lighting-technician friend was kind enough to bring in some porno. Thought my natural beauty would've been enough to keep him hard for three hours . . . I'm only joking. Come to think of it, my presence might have been the reason why he needed a pump.

MELISSA: He carries a pump around? Is it only for work, or does he have one with him at all times? I'm curious to know if you ever draw from memory, or do you always use models?

CARY: A pocket-size pump in your purse! I often draw from memory. Especially shoes, hair, and penises. And I also use photos for reference a lot. Sometimes it's hard to make up lights and shadows and what muscles would do when you're holding a weird pose. I don't really need to use models unless I'm working on a big drawing, like the one I showed at Perrotin.

MELISSA: Some people would consider any type of nudity as pornography. There is the age-old argument about pornography versus fine art. How do you feel about pornography? In your opinion, is there a difference between porn and art? What is it? Would you be upset if your work was labeled as porn instead of art?

CARY: I don't know, it's a difficult question. I think sometimes visually there can be a fine line if you don't consider the meaning or the purpose behind them. And sometimes things can be deliberately done in a certain way to imitate something different. But you do often find that porn documentation, either in film or stills, is quite badly lit, and not intentionally.

I don't think people usually label my work as porn. I think as soon as people calm down from their initial reaction to the subjects of my drawings, they start to appreciate the work and the technique that has gone into them. And series like "Cum To Barber" are often shown as one piece. Whether or not people get what I'm trying to say, I hope that the images collectively send a message across to the viewers. I guess the works mean different things to different people. And people who appreciate art, or things in general, don't usually pass judgments decidedly without considering the other sides of things. Intelligent people tend to look at things from multiple angles.

And hypocrites with dirty minds will always see filth in things. They will hate it because they're scared to be judged by their own kind.

MELISSA: Like how some of the most homophobic people are the most in the closet. Or how the biggest porn addicts are probably the biggest anti-porn advocates. The majority of people have looked at porn, whether they admit it or not. Do you ever look at porn?

CARY: What is so shameful about looking at porn, anyway? And yes, of course I do. What do you think?

MELISSA: I know. I just wanted you to say it! Does it inspire your work?

CARY: Yes, I guess it does inspire me.

MELISSA: How often do you look at porn?

CARY: Very often.

MELISSA: Do you have any favorite sites that you go to, or favorite movies? If given the chance, would you make a porno, either as a participant or to work behind the scenes? What if it wasn't called a porno but "performance art," instead? Would that change your mind about participation?

CARY: Is it all right to talk about my favorite porn in an interview like this? Do I have to censor names?

I like male masturbation films. There are some really good, amateur-looking ones with guys on their own just knocking one off. The guys are usually cute in a realistic way, with none of that stupid plucked-eyebrow, pouty-glossed lip, shiny, over-moisturized face shit. I am not judging, it's just not my kind of thing.

MELISSA: Everything I know about sex in porn I learned from you. Maybe some day this knowledge will come in handy, and I will thank you for it. Can we talk about being Chinese and gay? How has being a double minority affected your artwork, your career, your personal life?

CARY: Like all those labels—GB, BB, and CP? Being gay was a bit of a struggle as a teenager. I always knew I was attracted to other boys at school, and I never pretended that I fancied girls. I was quite comfortable with my sexuality in a way that I never felt like I had to act different in order to justify or adjust my gender role to be attracted to other guys. But I was scared of being found out by my family, only because I thought they were narrow-minded. I didn't think they would understand. I was hoping my mum would be more understanding. Once she asked me if I was gay, when I was only fourteen. Of course, when you're that age you answer no. I said no, and then she said, "Don't be!" I was thinking to myself, "It's not like a hobby!" I confronted her years later. Her defense was that she didn't want to encourage me to be gay. That was the most ridiculous thing I'd ever heard! Then I asked her if I should try to "encourage" her to lez up with some woman. Could she be encouraged?

MELISSA: Do you think it is important as an artist to be political? Make work that is a statement about what you believe in and what you don't?

CARY: I think everyone should be at least a bit political.

MELISSA: You are married. How long have you and your husband been together? How did you guys meet?

CARY: We've been together for five, almost six years now. We met seven or eight years ago at a mutual friend's birthday party. His haircut back then was kind of scary. I just finished college, and I was a bit of a style snob. Now I don't care how other people dress as long as I'm happy with the way I look—but I'm never too happy with the way I look. So we met again a couple of years later at a party. I had cut my hair short. He thought I looked friendlier, and we got on well. We've been together since. My husband's really cute. He looks like a penguin.

MELISSA: Penguins are pretty cute. Except for Danny DeVito in *Batman Returns*. Where did you get married, and what did you wear? Where did you go on your honeymoon?

CARY: We got married in London. We had our ceremony and spent the whole day eating and drinking with friends, and one of my cousins came all the way from Hong Kong for our wedding, too. It was fun! I just slicked my hair back as usual and wore 1950s-styled clothes, with black patent-leather Dries Van Noten brogues. My husband was quite casual; he wore a blazer and jeans. I went to Hong Kong by myself a few days later for work, actually. But we went back a few months later for him to meet my family.

MELISSA: Who are some of your favorite artists at the moment?

CARY: I love Djordje Ozbolt. And Pablo Bronstein's architectural drawings are beautiful. They are also Herald St artists. To me, their work is very romantic, whether it's meant to be or not. I probably understand it completely differently.

MELISSA: Being able to understand someone's work in your own way is the best part about art to me. I hate it when people make a point of explaining too much or who have to reference an artist's work in terms of influences, history, etc., to the death of it. I am interested in knowing these things but overanalyzing is exhausting, especially beyond a certain point. It's like, who cares? Can't we just

accept it for what it is and enjoy it? Too much time intellectualizing takes away from the work. We lose things, such as like how a piece of work affects us visually (as well as our other basic senses) and our immediate, intuitive responses. I like going with gut feelings sometimes. When it comes to art, everyone's reaction is valid. I'm not saying that I have a problem with conversation, but too much is too much. Our individual reactions are what personalize the artist's work. It connects the viewer with the art, and we can all leave with a piece of it that we understand. Otherwise, art is only for the elite.

Sorry for that bit of a rant. Just something that has been on my mind, and it makes sense to talk about it in this interview.

CARY: You're right! I feel the same, too. Maybe some people just desperately want to be considered as clever and intellectual and fail to see other aspects of life.

MELISSA: What is your favorite city to visit and why?

CARY: Can I give you a list of favorite cities? I have a few. New York is definitely my number one favorite city. I love the energy of the city and New Yorkers' enthusiasm. It's so youthful and energetic. I love that people there make an effort to be pleasant. Architecturally, it's stunning! It runs pretty much twenty-four hours a day. New York is the ultimate, quintessential metropolis.

And Paris, Paris is also one of my all-time favorites. It's so beautiful and romantic.

I went to Naples in Southern Italy a while ago. I only spent a week there, but I fell in love with it. The city has a strange energy to it. Perhaps it's volcanic.

And Shanghai is great! It's such a romantic city. I have some really good friends there. And people there are so attractive. So are people in NYC. It's strange how certain places breed attractive people.

London, of course. I have great friends here, and it is my home.

Then, Hong Kong. It's so convenient and efficient. But maybe it's a little bit too convenient, somehow; people don't seem to think much. I was born and brought up there, and I'm quite in tune with the fast-paced lifestyle. Sometimes I get frustrated with the slowness here in England and in Europe. People can be a bit too chill, like they don't care. Maybe I'm just too hectic. But I get frustrated with Hong Kongers, too, 'cause they can come across as quite rude, like when everyone wants to be the first off the train. They want to be two seconds faster than everyone else. My mum told me she fell over on a metro platform during rush hours and no one came to her rescue.

They just walked around her, and finally a young woman came to help her up. She must have been foreign. By the way, my mother is not that old; I wondered why she spent so long struggling to get up? She must have kept getting knocked over by the rushing passengers. I should not be laughing, but it is just too comical.

And now I wanna check out Beijing, Madrid, Tokyo, and Mumbai.

MELISSA: Does traveling inspire your art? For me, it definitely inspires my way of living, which I guess trickles down to every aspect of it, including creativity. When we travel, we are forced out of the boxes we put ourselves in and are reminded that there isn't only one way to live or be. We can choose! Nothing confirms that more than being out there and seeing the world for ourselves.

CARY: Traveling certainly inspires different aspects of my life. When I travel, I like to go to locals' places and meet people just to experience bits of a different way of life. There's no point hanging out in modern, generic bars and restaurants. Maybe, sometimes.

MELISSA: If you were not making art, what would you be doing instead?

CARY: I'll always be making art. And I want to make shoes and many other things, too.

So, how're you getting on with your book?

MELISSA: You mean my sci-fi, horror, fantasy epic that is going to make my first million? The future Oprah Book Club book-of-the month book that you're making the cover for? I'll keep you posted as soon as the first chapter is done!

How was your trip to Asia? I know you just went to Hong Kong and Shanghai. Also, what do you think of the official Beijing Olympics' mascots, who look like furry Teletubbies? They are a little creepy, but maybe others think they are cute?

CARY: Yes, that's the one! Your x-rated, sci-fi, horror, fantasy epic.

All cute things creep me out when they're bigger than a sumo wrestler.

Shanghai is amazing; I love it there. And Hong Kong was okay this time. The weather was shit!

MELISSA: Big plans for the next year? Any last thoughts about art, food, porn, or anything else for that matter?

CARY: I'd love to move in a few years. To keep getting inspired by things around me. Most things inspire me.

Porno's getting better. I like the DIY, amateur stuff.

Foodwise, I urge overseas Chinese restaurateurs and take-away owners to make good quality, PROPER regional Chinese food and stop giving us and our traditional cuisines a bad name! ■■