

FERTILE URINE

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL LEUNG



CREATIVE COMMONS
Creative Commons' Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

This video interview documents how the idea of making personal, human soil came about. During a community art project in Hong Kong, Markuz Wernli launched a petition to protect an outstanding fig tree on the rooftop of a vacant house in Kowloon. In the conversation with Michael Leung — an urban farmer and designer who lives next to the rooftop tree — we speculated how human waste products might have caused this lone tree to flourish on the building roof. It is this possible genesis that inspired The Nutrients Recovery.



MICHAEL LEUNG, URBAN FARMER AND DESIGNER IN HONG KONG, MUSES ABOUT HOW THE WILD GROWING ROOFTOP TREE NEXT TO HIS HOME CAME TO BE THROUGH HUMAN NUTRIENTS — VIDEO FOLLOWING SHORTLY.

ABSTRACT

Michael lives just opposite of The Lone Rooftop Tree on the corner of Hi Lung Lane and Shanghai Street in Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon.

He was extremely generous to invite me to his home and to share the relevance of 'the tree' — personally, socially and environmentally — while describing what makes Yau Ma Tei special to him. We speculated about the creation of 'the tree' and Michael came up with two possibilities. It is plausible (and fairly common) that birds or the wind carried the seed to the rooftop of 23 Temple Street. From there nature took its course.

The other, much more intriguing creation myth is that actually a pioneering urban gardener noticed the numerous abandoned toilets (urinals actually) on the rooftop and saw the potential to convert human nitrogen (which is superior to mineral nitrogen derived from fossil fuel) into a useful crop by planting fig trees. The question is who is this forward-thinking urban gardener was who started this fig plantation maybe 30 years ago?

For Michael it is evident that The Tree and the 60-year old building are symbiosis, not only biologically but also from an urban-his-

toric point of view. He recognizes that this low-rise corner building is not only a witness of an architectural period, but the carrier of important socio-public functions in this neighborhood. Michael Leung is a vehement proponent of preserving the building. This means to maintain the current store on the ground floor (with its strong social network) while making the house and the roof attractive for affordable residential, commercial and cultural use.

From a personal perspective The Tree is part of an 'therapeutical ecosystem' with refreshed air, birds and colorful laundry drying in the sun that makes this neighborhood worth living. Michael pointed to a scientific study in Germany where patients of a hospital recovered measurably better when they had a direct view to a tree from their bedrooms... Apparently The Tree not only endorses mental well-being.

He suspects that it might have also have left a footprint in his romantic life. When he initially dated his girlfriend she seemed to find a lot of comfort in Michael's living sphere, so it might very well be that The Tree was part of that.



THE LONE ROOFTOP TREE FROM MICHAEL'S WINDOW



MICHAEL BELIEVES THAT HUMAN NITROGEN...



...MADE THE TREE GROW ON A SLAB OF CONCRETE



HONG KONG ROOFTOPS OFTEN HAVE AN OUTHOUSE



AMAZING ROOT GROWTH WITHOUT SOIL



UNSOLICITED GREEN IN CONCRETE LANDSCAPE



VISITORS INSPECTING THE FIG TREE ON 23 TEMPLE ST



UNPLANNED ASSET OF AN INTACT NEIGHBORHOOD



TEMPLE ST NIGHT MARKET IN FULL SWING



TREE WITH ROMANTIC SIGNIFICANCE

MICHAEL LEUNG & HK FARM

Michael is the founder and creative director of HK Farm. He also runs HK Honey and co-founded a community-focused art and design platform called Shanghai Street Studios in Yau Ma Tei.

Michael's interest in agriculture started when he was living in London. Visiting food markets on the weekends and cooking Sunday roasts, he slowly developed his interest in food ethics and food origin.

In the Summer of 2011, Michael moved to New York for three months to work at the world's largest rooftop farm, Brooklyn Grange. His experience in New York has inspired him to bring fresh urban agriculture concepts to Hong Kong's concrete landscape.

<http://www.hkfarm.org/>