

Sleight - Identity and Recognition

by Yvonne Yuen Man Lo, June 2012

In the summer of 2012, Hong Kong bustles with the change of governments and its volatile political implications. Between public and business sectors, media and the city's cultural elites, the talks revolve around the change of camps, core values, identity recognition, creative positioning and the West Kowloon Cultural District. How do artists respond to these shifting values and recognition through accelerating times? For her exhibition at Lumenvisum, Wai Kit Lam employs a different visual language "Sleight" to convey her perspectives, using photography to demonstrate the meaning of her Hong Kong "identity" and "recognition." With her unique sensibility and experience, Lam constructs her distinct identity in colours and forms. It is the manifestation of femininity, the traces of passage of time, or the capture of an anecdote. It is also her inner concentration, her dedication to the meaning and value of living in the moment. It is an attitude of living that belongs to many others.

Wai Kit Lam began using self-portraits to grasp the transformation of her self-identity over a decade ago. It has sparked off many artistic journeys, as Lam explores the meaning of identity and recognition while wavering between reality and illusion in everyday life. Her works illuminate such concepts and execution in "Missing," "False Memory," "Divided Minds," "Forgotten Lands," and "Unknown." She uses a snapshot-inspired format to record the drifting state of mind, and to observe herself from the position of "other". If surrealist art is born in nirvana, Lam's works exist in the interspace between the illusory realm above and the solid ground. They stay close to real life, while seeking to break free from its constraints. They shake off all tangible forms, yet always return to reality. Surrealist art might have settled in nirvana because of the despair through the post-WWII era: Neither ordinary men nor exceptional talents could realize their hopes amid the political chaos. The only exit was to forsake reality for a new world in the subconscious, an inner paradise. Based in Hong Kong, Lam chooses to stay in that interspace since there are still gaps in her "recognition" of her position in reality. On her search for concreteness, the artist finds refuge in the interspace. Her drifting is a respite through the "Unknown," a window to observe the happenings. She said, "My body is an identity set in reality, while my feeling and spirit belong to another identity. I'm spiritually homeless. This homelessness carries its own burden..." The artist explores the limits of freedom as Henri Cartier-Bresson said, "[Photography] is a way of shouting, of freeing oneself...It is a way of life." It is an attitude of living, a resting place for the migrating birds in the interspace. They do not know the next direction for their flight, leave alone their destination.

For this exhibition, "Sleight," Lam created a series of new art piece by combining two separate photos. The two photos impart different themes; together they reveal the metaphors and sentimentality in the absence of order. The images are dialogue between private sphere and public space at times. At other times they illuminate each other and the hidden objects of affection, which sparkle against the night's veil before the viewers. The subjects of these images are familiar yet alien to the Hong Kong public. They are realistic renditions that lead the audience into a surreal world, through the intricate arrangement of photographic perspectives and colours. The photos depict delicate commodities for women, the state of self-examination by the self-portraitist, the ambiguity of the search for identity and the imprints of time. Lam makes use of implicit imagery and interesting structures, revealing a mysterious joy in a dimly lit backdrop. If not for her concrete depiction of the interspace, we might have let the imagery slip through our fingers without absorbing it. If her concept of interspace and subtle illustration can be applied to the broader discussions, they will definitely bring more refined, enriched and varied perspectives beyond the usual polarized views.

** From Henri Cartier-Bresson Quote: "As far as I am concerned, taking photographs is a means of understanding which cannot be separated from other means of visual expression. It is a way of shouting, of freeing oneself, not of proving or asserting one's own originality. It is a way of life."*

移形換影 - 身分和認同

盧婉雯，香港，2012

2012年香港的夏天，正值是城中特區政府政局交替，官商傳媒和文化人都鬧得熱哄哄，討論着陣營轉移、核心價值、身分認同、創意定位和西九計劃的話題，藝術人在這個急變的時機中又怎樣回應轉化的價值和認同呢？藝術家林慧潔這次在光影作坊的展覽中用不一樣的話語姿態－「移形換影」來表達她的觀點，用照片來展示她的香港「身分」和「認同」的意義。她用獨特的觸覺和個人的體驗，以色彩和造型建構她不一樣的身分；是外在女性韻味的形態，是歲月對照的留痕，是匆匆的生活的一個片段，也是她內在的精神的一種專注，與及她持守著生活在當下的意義和價值，是生活態度也是不少人的生活態度。

林慧潔在十多年前開始有系統地用自拍像去了解自我身分的轉變，並由此開展了她各項的藝術旅程，在似實還虛的生活空間中探索身分和認同的意義。她的作品有「下落不明」、「虛假記憶」、「左思右想」、「湮沒之地」和「未知」等概念和實踐。她用那彷彿抓拍的方式，紀錄著飄忽游移的精神狀態，用「他者」的身分反觀自己。如果說超現實的作品是處於太虛中天馬行空的創作，那麼林慧潔的作品則是居停於天空與地面的中虛之境，接近生活但又不願受生活的羈絆，要脫離肉身又不忘回顧現實的狀況。超現實的藝術若要選擇太虛作為棲身之所，是因為有感世界大戰後無論是平民百姓或者是精英人士，在現實的政局中根本是無可作為，所以只有放棄現實轉投潛意識的新天地，才能在那裡另闢樂土。相對林慧潔處身於亞洲香港，選擇居留在中虛之境是因為她在「認同」現實的位置上仍有落差，在未有肯定能否有所作為的時候尋找一個中休之所，她之所以浮游是在「未知」的時候稍作歇息，以觀實況。她說：「我的身體是屬於一個現實設定的身分，但我的感覺和精神狀態是屬於另外一個身分的，我是無（以為）家的（精神上 homeless），而無家有無家的負擔……」。她探索自由的界線，狀況猶如是攝影師布列松所說：*「拍照是一種吶喊，是釋放自我的一種生活方式。」，是一種生活態度，是在中虛的位置找到一個像候鳥移居時的中途站以作為休憩，目前未有展翅的方向，更遑論那裡才是歸屬之地。

這次展出的「移形換影」，她用兩張獨立照片並置在一起，組成一張單獨作品。兩張不同的照片有着不同的主題，綜合了無序中蘊含着相關的隱喻和感性。兩張照片有時是私密空間與群眾空間互相呼應，也有時是同時互相強化，隱藏內心依戀的一些物象，讓觀者看着它們在迷幻的夜裡，散放著動人眩目的光芒。作品所捕捉的空間是香港人熟悉的，又同時是陌生的，既是真實似的再現，也同時又因應着拍攝的角度和色彩的安排，帶觀者到一個超現實的世界。照片呈現了細緻優雅的女性消費品、自拍者自我審視的狀態、尋覓身分的迷朦，與及時光留下斑斑的痕跡，慧潔使用暗示性的意象和趣味性的肌理，從燈火欄珊處幽幽地展露一種迷離的欣悅。如果沒有她具體地勾勒出這個中虛境界，我們也許會輕易地讓意象如弱水三千般的流走而從沒有取一瓢飲的動機，她的中虛概念和勾勒若能在熱哄哄的大討論中派得上用場的話，肯定能夠提供一些非黑即白以外，更細緻更立體和更豐富的討論。

* 布列松：「在我看來，攝影是一種與其他視覺表達方式不可分割的認知。拍照是一種吶喊，是自我釋放，而並非執意證明或確立自身的原創性。攝影是一種生活方式。」