

## Curatorial statement

### **A Room with a View**

- Carol Pui Ha Chow, 10.2015

In his book "Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance", Professor Ackbar Abbas has pointed out back in 1997 that Hong Kong, being caught in a tug of war among the forces of decolonization, nationalism and globalization, has changed from "reverse hallucination", a state of not seeing what is there, to "a culture of disappearance". Such disappearance is not physical nonappearance, but instead a state of misrecognition, of recognizing a thing as something else, as a result of its elusiveness in efforts to present it.

It has been 18 years since 1997. More and more has been disappearing from the city during this period, be it politically or culturally. If photography does have the property to extend a moment in time, then using photography to document and even reconstruct disappeared images is in effect an act to resist disappearance. Non-presence has become presence through photography. More importantly, the subjectivity of the photographer is fortified in the process of searching for disappearance. And when a flock of photographers in our city happen to search vanished images at the same time, the subjectivity of Hong Kong is made stronger instead in the wrestling between searching and disappearing.

This exhibition "a Room with a View" seeks to show the subjectivity of Hong Kong in search of disappearance. The word *Kan* in the Chinese title of the exhibition concerns space as much as time; the two plots the coordinates of history. We live in a space where stories of all kinds take place, where memory and sentiment accumulate, and where recognition is built. These stories become history through narratives. What has become history has always been largely about men — *His* story; As for history about women — *Her* story, it has mostly become another form of "reverse hallucination", meaning it is often ignored. What is being searched for in this exhibition is *her* stories, ignored and disappearing. And it happens that these stories also use photography and video to seek, document, capture, reproduce or even reconstruct a vanished space.

As early as the 80s, Wong Wo-Bik has captured disappeared landscapes with her camera. In "Identity: video and sound" which is on display in this exhibition, Wong gathers her works taken from different periods — a number of places marked with strong colonial traces, including the Eu Tong-Sen family's castle-style mansion, Lai Chi Kok Amusement Park (Lai Yuen) and the Central Police Station. Castles, amusement parks and police stations are all what Foucault to as heterotopias. Combining feng shui and a European-style castle design, the Eu family's mansion is a mixed carrier of the diaspora of the Chinese people, folk religions and imagination of foreign countries. Combining spaces of various natures including a haunted house, a zoo and a Sung dynasty village, Lai Yuen is the collective memory of a certain generation. As for the architectural compound consisting of the Central Police Station, the Victoria Prison and the Central Magistracy, not only was it a standardized technical system, which was open as well as closed, it was also the cradle of Hong Kong's rule of law and legal system. As is the case with Hong Kong's colonial identity, these heterotopias are disappearing one by one or appearing in other forms. Wong shows their disappearance in a poignant, bitter cold and illusory manner, giving voice to not simply just a nostalgic longing for the past; rather the bleak, empty landscapes exude more of a sense of loss in the disappearance of history and the resulted mental state of uncertainty (about one's identity). The phantoms trapped in photos can no longer stand their entrapment, stepping out and summoning history as they linger between fantasy and reality.

Also a prison, but this time the Stasi Prison in former East Germany, which has turned into a museum. After visiting the museum that was previously used by the former East Germany government to imprison and persecute political prisoners, Lam Wai-kit created "Which things were (are) allowed and which were (are) not" on the theme of secret self-surveillance. It is a self-reflexive scrutiny, one that crosses time and space, of the shrinking freedom of speech and the strengthening of ideological control in today's Hong Kong. This is done so through "resurrecting" a place where political prisoners are persecuted in the former East Germany. As for the 135 passport photos taken in different places in "Passport Photos 2002 —", they are not only evidence of the intense, rapid changes experienced by individuals in a globalized era, but also prime examples of how social frameworks and ideologies shape individuals inadvertently in our everyday lives.

What has been disappearing from this city is not only the space for freedom, but also a livable space. The problem of social injustice resulting from collusion between commercial corporations and government officials as well as developer hegemony is getting worse and worse. In "Gift" series, Yiu Mui-Lai Joe shows in a humorous manner how people at the grass-roots level are stripped off their rights to a decent living environment, with screen-wall-style high rises blocking views and air ventilation and causing light pollution. "Returning home" goes further to show the records and results of Yiu going to great lengths to find her childhood home that is gone. On the one hand, these two sets of participatory creative work exhibit the constructive characteristic of photography, and on the other hand, they project the trend embraced by Hong Kong's post-materialistic generations of taking active actions to combat social injustice.

Law Yuk-Mui's "the Yellow Portrait" is an attempt to give prominence to the power of yellow with black-and-white photographic films, but unfortunately, yellow umbrellas are eventually muffled by heavy blankets of snow. In spite of this, photos and even the broken films as well as the disappeared 17 frames of images together have left a footnote to the movement in 2014, which is woven from beauty and melancholy. Perhaps as illustrated in the photos by Law, energy is harnessed and stored up bit by bit silently, like how the rain nourishes the earth silently and tenderly in "Spring Rain"; or like how even tropical plants with buttress roots which are transplanted from overseas can grow and thrive in the landfill site of "Junk Bay". Making cyanotype with plants from King Lam Estate, Law expresses her feelings about her humble abode in a poetic way and at the same time spells out a topic that is of increasing concern among Hong Kongers in recent years — the co-existence between mankind and nature in her "On Junk Bay, King Lam Est., The Plant" series.

In a postmodern world where everything is disappearing in the blink of an eye, fragmentation and mobility are indeed the genuine forms. In her "Hong Kong Story", Yvonne Lo Yuen-Man uses collages to re-assemble fragments in everyday life. Each re-assembly is undoubtedly a re-organization of the author's personal memories and emotions. However, when these fragments are scavenged by a flaneur-author from wandering around the city throughout the years, the assembled work is in fact more of a map with personal and social history being intertwined on it. The familiar icons in the images: the cross on the wall, the old tree with twisting roots and interlocking branches in front of a temple, Hong Kong-Macau Ferry Terminal, Chinese-funded banks, etc. reveal not only the author's footprints of roaming around our city or elsewhere but also subtly divulge the historical trajectory of Hong Kong's transition from a colony to its handover back to China. The emotions expressed in the images — melancholy, anxiety, blissfulness, nostalgia, uncertainty, etc., as well as the ambivalent relationship with the city, which is at one distant and intimate — resonate with Hong Kongers' state of mind and complex emotions in the wake of the current situation.

What is ambivalent is not only the relationship between the flaneur and the city. It also applies to the Hong Kong identity meandering through the fissure between the former colonizer Britain and the "sovereign state" of China. Such ambivalence is unraveled in both the creative trajectory and the work of Lau Wai's "No. 18 Folgate Street", "Here" and "Album". In "No 18 Folgate Street," with muddled historical knowledge about the former colonizer and a critical attitude toward presumed discourse, Lau materialized, in a fictional setting, her own imagery of an old British building that is "restored" to the Victorian and Gregorian Style in the 18th and 19th centuries. The result is a the creation of a space that is permeated with extraordinary contradictions, one that resembles a (post)-colonial places. In "Here" and "Album", through her family album as well as her journey following her parents' footsteps before they came to Hong Kong, Lau searched for the history from which she was absent. The journey from Britain to China, the disorientation and the skepticism towards both the history of British and that of China, are precisely embodied representation of the confused Hong Kong identity. As a tool for probing and searching, the camera plays a greater role as a mirror in the process of recognizing identity. And when using the camera consciously to challenge presumed discourses in current landscape, Lau not only demonstrates vividly the constitutive nature of photography, but also, at the same time, articulates any journey that makes an attempt to search history and memory is never a one way retrospection but the rewriting of history with future implication.

The view in "A Room with a View" is one that is uncovered through reconstructing in retrospect, and one about the possibility of such reconstruction. What comes into view is exactly the resistance to a politics of disappearance through the artists' representation of those disappearances.

策展人序言

## 境遇之間

- 周佩霞，10.2015

九七時，港大教授阿巴斯 (Ackbar Abbas) 早就在其著作《香港：文化與消失的政治》(Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance)中指出，香港在去殖、國族主義及全球化三種力量的牽扯下，由原來視而不見的「逆向幻覺」狀態轉為「消失的政治」，而消失不是物理上的不存在，而是因為努力呈現卻又觸摸不定而產生的誤認的狀態。

現在距離九七經已十八年，在這期間，消失於這城的愈來愈多，不管是政治還是文化上的。假如攝影真的具有延伸瞬間的特性，那末，用攝影去紀錄甚至重構消失的景象，其實也是抵抗消失的行徑。透過攝影，不在又變成在。更重要的是，攝影師的主體性在尋找消失的過程中，更加確立；而當一群我城的攝影師不約而同地尋找消失的景象時，香港的主體性在尋找與消失的角力中反而更加牢固。

《境遇之間》是一個以尋找消失去呈現香港主體的展覽。間，是空間，也是時間，兩者構成歷史的座標。我們在空間中生活，在空間中發生各式各樣的故事，累積記憶與情感、建立認同。這些故事，經過敘述，變成歷史。一直以來，能成為歷史的，大多是男性的故事，女性的，大多變成另一種「逆向幻覺」，往往被視而不見。《境遇之間》中的尋找和消失，是被忽略的她們的故事，而這些故事，剛巧又是以攝影和錄像去尋找、紀錄、捕捉、再現甚至重構消失的空間。

早於八十年代，王禾璧經已以鏡頭捕捉消失的景觀。是次展出的《身份·視像與聲音》，收錄了王於不同時期拍攝的餘東旋家族古堡式的大宅、荔園和中環警署這幾個富有強烈殖民印記的地方。城堡、遊樂場及警署都是 Foucault 所說的「異托邦」(heterotopias)：結合風水及歐陸式城堡設計的余園，是華人離散的經驗、民間信仰以及異國想像混合的載體；集鬼屋、動物園、宋城等不同性質空間於一身的荔園，是某一代香港人的集體記憶；至於中環警署、監獄、裁判署建築群這個既開放且關閉的規訓技術系統，更是香港法治和司法體系的地方孕育成長的場所。這些異托邦，像香港的殖民地身份一樣，逐一消失，或以其他姿態存在。王氏以淒美冷峻虛幻的姿態呈現它們，流露的不純然是戀棧式的懷舊，幽空的景象背後，滲著的更多是對歷史消失的失落和因而產生的（身份）不確定的精神狀態。被困在相片中的幽靈，終究沉不住，走出來，徘徊在虛構與真實之間，呼召歷史。

也是監獄，不過是今已變成博物館的前東 Stasi 監獄，林慧潔在參觀這所前東德政府用來囚禁迫害政治犯的博物館後，創作了以自我秘密監視為題材的《允許與不允許》，對自身所處的香港所面對的言論空間日漸萎縮和意識形態控制日漸加強的狀況，作了自省式的跨時空的審閱。至於《証件相 2002-》展示的 130 多張在不同地方所拍的証件相，除了是全球化年代劇烈流動經驗在個體身上的證物，更是社會框架和意識形態如何在日常生活中不經意地模塑著個體的最佳寫照。

這城消失的不只是自由的空間，還有宜居空間。官商勾結、地產霸權導致社會不公義的情況愈來愈嚴重。姚妙麗的《送》，以幽默調侃的方式，顯示草根階層如何在資本家的剝削下失去看風景、享受涼風甚至黑暗的權利。至於《回去消失了的的家》，更是姚氏大費周章去尋找消失了的兒時居所的記錄和成果。這兩組介入式的創作，一方面展示了攝影的建構性質，另一方面折射了香港後物質世代如何以積極的行動，對抗社會不公義的趨勢。

羅玉梅的《黃色肖像》，企圖以黑白菲林突現黃色的力量，但黃色雨傘終究敗給茫茫白雪。儘管如此，那幀相片以至折斷了的菲林與消失了的十七格影像，一同為 2014 年的那場運動，留下美麗與哀愁交織的註腳。或者，就如羅氏的另一幀作品所言，潤物細無聲，力量一點點地無聲積存。就如別處移植過來的熱帶板根植物，也可在「垃圾灣」的堆田區上，茁壯成長。羅氏

用景林村植物製作出來的移印作品，詩意地表達了個人對身處居所的情感的同時，亦則寫了近年港人愈來愈關心的命題——人與自然的共生。

在甚麼都消失於瞬間的（後）現代社會裡，碎片和浮動才是真實的形態。盧婉雯的《香港故事》，以拼貼方式，重新組合日常生活的碎片。每次重組，固然是作者個人記憶與情感的一次整理；但當這些碎片是一個城市漫遊者的作者經過多年撿拾回來的街角掠影時，拼貼出來的，其實更是一幅交疊著個人與社會的歷史空間圖譜。在相片中出現的熟悉的符號：牆上的十字架、廟宇前盤根錯節的古老大樹、港澳碼頭、中資銀行等等，不單流露了作者於我城或他方行走的蹤跡，它們亦隱隱地揭示著香港從殖民到回歸的歷史軌跡。而浮現在相片的各種情感：憂傷、焦慮、喜悅、對往昔的緬懷、不安等，以及那種與城市若即若離的曖昧關係，更是與港人在當下處境的心理狀態和複雜情緒，遙相呼應。

曖昧的不只是城市漫遊者與城市的關係，還有遊走於中英這兩個「宗主國」/「殖民者」之間的港人身份。這種曖昧性，在劉衛的「福爾蓋特街 18 號」、「此」和「相冊」創作過程和作品中表露無遺。在「福爾蓋特街 18 號」中，劉帶著對前殖民者模糊的歷史認知，以及對預設論述的批判態度，在一所「還原」十八、十九世紀時期喬治亞及維多利亞風格的英國古老住宅中，以虛構的情景，再現她對那地方的歷史想像，結果製造了一個（後）殖民地一樣充滿異常矛盾的特殊空間。在「此」和「相冊」中，劉氏則以家庭照片相冊以及親自到訪父母來港前在中國內地的足跡，去追尋那段她所缺席的歷史。劉衛從英國到中國的尋索過程，以及對兩地歷史的迷失和懷疑，本身經已是香港身份迷失的具體呈現；攝影機作為試探的工具，更是飾演著身份認同過程中的鏡像功能；而當中劉氏有意識地借攝影機去挑戰眼前景象的預設論述，不單鮮明地展示了攝影建構現實的功能，同時道出了每次以攝影去尋找歷史、記憶的旅程，永遠不是一種單向的回溯，而是一種可以改寫未來的歷史再書寫。

景遇之間，就是從回溯到重構所展現的一度風景，和這度風景揭示的可能性。這次的風景，正是在她們各自再現消失中，對抗在這城的消失的政治的景遇。