

# Chi-Wen Gallery

## Press Release

### **Kingdom of Wonder**

Artists: Chien-Chi Chang, Hsu Chia-Wei, Michael Lin, Peng Hung-Chih, Yu Cheng-Ta, Yuan Goang-Ming

Exhibition Dates: 1 June - 13 July, 2019

Opening: 3:00-6:00pm, 1 June

Chi-Wen Gallery is delighted to present "Kingdom of Wonder" in which 6 Taiwanese artists set their eyes on art, religion, sex and politics in S.E. Asia.

The title "Kingdom of Wonder" comes from the inscription on the Cambodian guitar played by a performer in Hsu Chia Wei's video *"Rooftop"*, which is part of his *"White Building"* video series made in Cambodia. Since its opening in 1963, the White Building, performance art and politics were closely interwoven. With different places and performance artists, this series documents the 'performance image' of the White Building.

Peng Hung-Chih's *"Canine Monk"* series shows footage of his dog licking off dog food from a wall backwards, creating the appearance that the dog is writing religious texts with his tongue. There is no illusion that the dog is doing anything else than feeding himself, but his passion for the food reveals that he has not freed himself from the same desires that prevent enlightenment in humans.

In the video dramamentary *"Tell Me What You Want"* artist Yu Chang-Ta, as his alter-ego 'David', tries to make friends with pimps in a Manila red light district to collaborate in the making of his production through an exchange of favours. The work prompts the viewer to contemplate whether this collaboration represents true friendship or market transaction, all the while revealing stereotypes and class structures hidden behind international politics.

For the project Locomotion, which was commissioned by MCAD Manila in 2016, Michael Lin covered not only the museum walls with his famous floral patterns, but also the canvas covers of 15 local pedicabs. Pedicabs are a common means of transportation in Manila, and by exchanging his floral designs with pedicab drivers for their own creative collages, Lin's work was brought to the urban public space while the drivers' colourful folk art was displayed in the museum in return. The exchange created an equal partnership between Lin and the participating drivers as well as an exchange of not only materials, but also of the role of people and the function of places

On weekends and holidays, the Zhongli train station in Taiwan is filled with migrant workers hoping for a better life away from their home countries. Today, as throughout history, the world sees a surging wave of refugees and if we think about the millions of Mainland troops and civilians who retreated to Taiwan after the Kuomintang lost the 1949 Chinese Civil War, these immigrants, the artist's father included, could also be considered refugees.

For his video *"The Strangers"*, Yuan uses a high-speed camera and a spotlight to shoot from the train through the window. As the train approaches the platform, he turns on the spotlight, and the high-speed camera begins filming the people waiting for the train at a speed of 1,200 frames per second. The eight seconds of filming become eight minutes when played at normal speed, turning these strangers into sculptures, frozen in time, somber portraits that look us in the eyes.

In *"Burma: The Promise Betrayed"*, Chang mourns the passing of Myanmar's symbol of democracy. Aung San Suu Kyi, now the 1st State Counsellor of Myanmar, used to be called 'The Lady' for her courage in fighting against a brutal military junta. People hoped she would put things right, bring peace and end the Rohingya tragedy. Nevertheless, the civil war continues, and the ethnic cleansing only gets worse and the believers in human rights are being betrayed.

Complementing the exhibition will be a selection of Chien-Chi Chang's photography from his essential series *"Double Happiness"* and *"Burmese Days"*.

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## Artwork Description



Hsu Chia-Wei, *White Building*, 2016, Four-channel video, Colour, Sound, 2'37", 1'50", 4'25", 9'25"

***White Building Project***, made by Hsu Chia-Wei in 2016, is a series of videos in a collaboration with the performance artists who used to live in the White Building in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Cambodia gained independence in 1953 from the colonization of the French. Three years later, Vann Molyvann, who studied Architecture in Paris, returned to his country and was appointed as Head of Public Works and State Architect. He therefore opened the Golden Age, and supervised the design of many of New Khmer Architecture. The team chose the 24-hectare land along the Bassac River, accomplished an ambitious urban planning project, including the multi-layers and low-cost residential houses and the public buildings, such as the National Theatre Preah Suramarit and the Exhibition Hall.

In 1963, the White Building located in this area inaugurated. With lowest price, it offered 468 units of residents including municipal officers, general officers and teachers. The team combined the style of French Minimalism and the concept of Cambodian traditional Stilt house, and constructed this four-floor building along the river. The long arcade extends 325 meter. You can overlook the river, no matter where you are in the building.

In 1975, the soldiers of Khmer Rouge occupied Phnom Penh, the citizens moved away, the White Building was left behind. The ideal of New Khmer Architecture and the Golden Age disappeared. While the Khmer Rouge was in power, 90 percent of artists were executed as the traditional performance art was regarded as a symbol of the old regime. After the collapse of Khmer Rouge government, the survival performance artists, were called to live in the White Building. Being through the 50-year, civil war, humidity, fire and lack of fund, this building eventually turned into a grey and worn-out residency for low-income residents with poor facilities.

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White Building – Sva Pul



White Building – Sisters

## **White Building – Sva Pul , Single-channel video, 2'37", 2016**

*Sva Pul is a Cambodian traditional dance. The dancers are mainly children with masks on their faces as pupils of Hanuman, the Monkey God. They were invited by the artist to perform on the ground floor of the White Building. As the original design of the White Building adapted the one of Rural Khmer house, the ground floor used to be an open space until the residents built houses there when it became shallow and dark. The dancers are giving impromptu performance in the cramped space. The artist also invited architect Pen Sereypagna to make a 3D animation depicting the original building and display along with Sva Pul.*

## **White Building – Sisters , Single-channel video, 1'50", 2016**

*Yon Davy and Yon Chantha are sisters born in the White building and have been living there since then. Davy specializes contemporary dance while Chantha specializes in traditional dance Apsara. The artist invited them to perform in a new-built building in Phnom Penh. During these year Phnom Penh has seen rapid development with various modern buildings built, whereas the old White Building is facing dismantling. The scene in this video reflects the changing faces of a city. In this video, the sisters are having a body conversation via two different type of dances in the construction site.*



White Building – Rooftop



White Building – Kong Nay

## **White Building – Rooftop, Single-channel video, 4'25", 2016**

*Nou Samnang and Mel Phanna are young Chapei Dong Veng musicians. They were invited to hold a performance event on the rooftop of the White Building, and all the residents in this building are invited to attend. The video comprised this main scene. The performance is in the form of traditional Chapei Dong Veng while two of them having conversation that is sometimes against each other. The history and current state of the White Building is hence presented in a witty way.*

## **White Building – Kong Nay, Single-channel video, 9'25", 2016**

*Kong Nay is one of relatively few great Chapei Dong Veng masters to have survived the Khmer Rouge era. Blind from the age of four as a result of smallpox, he is very gifted in music as a signing poem. He used to live in the White Building, and now he lives in the Kampot Province, a country side of Cambodia. The artist visited Kong Nay with photographers and sound recordists, and made this long take video. In this video Kong Nay performs an ancient story about Chapei Dong Veng.*



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Yu Cheng-Ta, *Yu Cheng-Ta Store*, 2018, Mixed Media Installation, Dimensions Variable. The Shop, Single-channel video, Colour, Sound, 16'52"

## ***Tell Me What You Want - Yu Cheng-Ta Store, 2018***

The title of the project "Tell Me What You Want", refers to a sort of a greeting in the red-light district of Malate in Manila, which in turn refers to the local transactional structure used on the streets. This transactional structure can be described as a kind of an exchange or barter system. The artist's relationship of exchange started when he was on a street in Malate, where as a foreigner he engaged the local small-time hustlers, referred to as "Marketing Boys". Working primarily with non-professional actors in staged performances, Yu has developed a body of work that deals with the interstitial spaces and humorous misunderstandings that arise when different languages and cultures collide. Yu creates a Monument to his recent film project in Manila. The installation is a life size copy of the convenience store that his film character David gifted to the 'Marketing Boy' Junio in exchange for his help during the film production, combined with the showing of the film "Tell Me What You Want - The Shop".

## **About "Tell Me What You Want" Project (2015-17)**

'Tell Me What You Want' is an ambitious 4 screen video project about the interactions of a tourist and the inhabitants of an exotic culture, culminating in friendship. The project was created between November 2015 and June 2017, when the artist Yu Cheng-Ta flew frequently from Taipei to Manila, all the while assuming identities of that of a traveller, a friend, and a film producer. The title of the project 'Tell Me What You Want', refers to a sort of a greeting in the red-light district of Malate in Manila, which in turn refers to the local transactional structure used on the streets. This transactional structure can be described as a kind of an exchange or barter system. The artist's relationship of exchange started when he was on a street in Malate, where as a foreigner he engaged the local small-time hustlers, referred to as 'Marketing Boys'.

Owing to the needs of shooting his film, Yu enters into negotiations as well as transactions with the men. The various relationships and processes of exchange are intertwined with reality, the social network, the diverse longings and the imaginative perspectives across cultures. From these unusual encounters, he developed a friendship. Yu incorporated the negotiation of exchange of the local streets into the production of the project as a whole. He kept experimenting with the social and economic frameworks beneath these relationships of exchange, while at the same time, he tried to draw out the definitions of friendly exchange and transaction from the viewpoints of different cultures, disclose the bias rooted among different nationalities, and uncover the hidden class consciousness behind tourism and international relations.

The final result of his time in Manila are four video mockumentaries: 'Malate', 'David', 'Joara', and 'The Shop', which are independent yet synchronized with one another. Separately each film symbolizes the products derived from various people, cultures, viewpoints, and longings. The artist himself, through the reflection of his foreign character 'David', is the commonality implied in the four films, and through which many of the core issues of this exhibition are exposed.

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Michael Lin, *Arellano*, 2016, Refurbished pedicab (steel, rubber, tarpaulin, foam, synthetic, leather), 130x127x182cm

For the project *Locomotion*, which was commissioned by MCAD Manila in 2016, Michael Lin covered not only the museum walls with his famous floral patterns, but also the canvas covers of 15 local pedicabs. Pedicabs are a common means of transportation in Manila, and by exchanging his floral designs with pedicab drivers for their own creative collages, Lin's work was brought to the urban public space while the drivers' colourful folk art was displayed in the museum in return. The exchange created an equal partnership between Lin and the participating drivers as well as an exchange of not only materials, but also of the role of people and the function of places

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Yuan Goang-Ming, *The Strangers*, 2018, Single-channel video, Colour, Sound, 6'24"

## ***The Strangers, 2018***

On weekends or holidays, the Zhongli train station in Taiwan is filled with migrant workers. The voices and odours in the station almost trick someone into thinking they're in another train station in some Southeastern Asian country.

The total population of migrant workers in Taiwan has exceeded that of Taiwanese aborigines. They migrate for better economic or living conditions, a not-so-uncommon phenomenon that can be found throughout history. Today the world sees a surging wave of war refugees, from Afghanistan, Somalia, to Libya, from Myanmar's Rohingya people to five million refugees of Syria. If we think about the millions of Mainlander troops and civilians who retreated to Taiwan after the

Kuomintang lost the 1949 Chinese Civil War, these immigrants, the artist's father included, are regarded as "displaced persons" under the category of sociology. And his father would be considered a refugee during the Chinese Civil War, a stranger away from home.

For "*The Strangers*", Yuan uses a high-speed camera and a high-lumen spotlight to shoot from the passenger car through the window. As the train approaches the platform, he turns on the spotlight, and the high-speed camera begins filming the passengers waiting on the platform at a speed of 1,200 frames per second. The eight seconds of filming become eight minutes when played at a normal speed. As the camera captures each foreign face in high speed, these Strangers turn into sculptures, frozen in time, on a platform that morphs into a spotlighted stage where one by one they appear to be in a somber portrait that looks us in the face.



# Chi-Wen Gallery



Chien-Chi Chang, *The Lady, Rangoon*, 2011 (Left), *Buddha Statue, Bago* (Right), Silver Gelatin Print, 50.8x60.3cm

## ***Burma: The Promise Betrayed, 2018***

They call her The Lady.

She fought a brutal military junta in Myanmar, and it cost her.

Aung San Suu Kyi lost her freedom and her husband.

And became a symbol of hope for the Burmese people.

She lived under house arrest for decades, while world leaders honored her—she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

As the military brutalized the citizenry, and the nation's many ethnic minorities warred, The Lady's aura as saint, icon, and savior was burnished ever brighter.

Battered by international sanctions and a stalled economy, after half a century the generals finally allowed elections.

Borders opened.

The moral gravitas of The Lady had won.

Her appointment in 2015 as First State Counselor, a post equivalent to prime minister, prompted rejoicing around the world.

The Lady would put things right, make peace and end the massacre of the Rohingya, a Muslim minority who the United Nations calls the most persecuted people on earth.

But The Lady vanished.

She held no press conferences, no rallies or speeches.

Government didn't function.

Economic plans floundered.

Civil wars continued.

Ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya worsened.

The human rights champions who supported Suu Kyi felt utterly betrayed.

The Lady is in her seventies now, and the promise of her infant democracy is fading.

The military steps into the vacuum.

The Rohingya flee by the hundreds of thousands into Bangladesh.

The future looks grim.

Instead of being a shining star, The Lady will become a sad historical footnote.

## Chi-Wen Gallery



Chien-Chi Chang, *Double Happiness*, 2003-2009, Photography, Silver Gelatin Print, 33x38cm

### ***Double Happiness, 2003-2009***

The works by Taiwanese artist Chien-Chi Chang address human migration and displacement as an aspect of globalization, the process of which has accelerated over the last century and has since become a major issue of public interest. This displacement of people is caused by either war, oppression or economic hardship and the works address this in its own unique way, whether we follow North Korean refugees fleeing to China, Chinese immigrants settling in New York's Chinatown or indeed Vietnamese Brides seeking happiness in Taiwan. Being from Taiwan, the artist himself is from a country that is largely populated by immigrants, the effect of which is reflected in the nation's lively political discourse, making Chien-Chi Chang uniquely equipped to comment on this particular issue.

*Double Happiness (2003-2009)* addresses the fringes of the wedding industry: the voluntary importation of women from Vietnam and other poorer Asian countries into Taiwan for the purpose of brokered marriages. In this process, a selection of young women are displayed to the men who sign up for the service; if a man chooses one of the girls and she accepts the proposal, the marriage takes place within three days. The marriage broker handles the entire affair from selection process to ceremony. Chang offers a series of scenarios throughout the process such as selection, application and paperwork, and ceremony. The images are accompanied by interviews with the brokers, the men and women, and sample "interviews" that take place between the potential bride and grooms as they determine the suitability of their partners.



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Peng Hung-Chih, *Canine Monks - Excerpts from the Thai Theravada Prayers*, 2004-2008, Single-channel video, Colour, Silence, 9'41"

## **Canine Monk, 2004-2008**

In the series of works entitled "Canine Monk", Peng's dog literally steps in his artist-owner's place as creative subject. In the videos, the dog writes texts from central religious scriptures on the wall. The artist first painted the words in oil and then covered them with dog food. When the common video feature of rewind was used, the role of the dog changes from instinctive creature to creative agent, thereby thematizing another "rewind;" dog is god in reverse. At once innocent creature, inferior species as well as trusted companion, the dog holds an ambivalent position as mediator of often sacred texts. While the artist William Wegman often dresses up his dogs and positions them in anthropomorphic scenarios, Peng's four-legged companion is elevated to performing subject, thereby displacing its human counterpart. The dog intervenes between reader and text, thus defamiliarizing what are often familiar passages. The piece therefore raises questions that are not normally pondered: who is the writing subject of these writings and to whom are they addressed? When articulated via the mouth of the dog, the words, strangely, seem all the more human.

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