

## Homeland in Transit: Artists from Hong Kong, Taipei and the Diaspora

Oscar Chan Yik Long (Helsinki), Isaac Chong Wai (Hong Kong / Berlin), Leung Chi Wo (Hong Kong), Hedy Leung (London), Anson Mak (Hong Kong), Musquiqui Chihying (Taipei / Berlin), Winnie Soon (Hong Kong / London), Angela Su (Hong Kong)

Co-curated by Heidi Brunnschweiler and Angelika Li

Exhibition | 15.9.2023 – 12.11.2023

Vernissage | Th 14.9.2023 | 19 h | Foyer

Opening performance by Hedy Leung

Galerie für Gegenwartskunst, E-WERK Freiburg  
Eschholzstrasse 77, 79106 Freiburg im Breisgau, DE

### Curatorial Notes

In the short span since its inception by Hong Kong curator Angelika Li in June 2019, 'Homeland in Transit' has witnessed a profound metamorphosis in our world: the pandemic, environmental crisis, socio-political shifts, threatened geopolitical orders, and various movements spreading across the globe. Every word of this title has expanded, delving into intricate depths of meaning. The narrative tapestry of 'Homeland in Transit' meanders through a series of exhibition chapters, interweaving a metaphorical framework evoked by the hydrological cycle—water, cloud, and wind. This cycle, symbolic of the delicate interplay between fragility and resilience, prompts reflection on its manifestations within our contemporary climate and human condition.

As the world stands poised in the landscape of 2023, have the precious elements of life come to grasp the rhythm of this cycle? Our words, voices, songs, thoughts, expressions, identities, orientations, faiths, histories... Do they find themselves caught in a swirl of smoke, evaporating like mist or clouds, scattering across the horizon? 煙消雲散: literally meaning 'smoke vanishes and clouds scatter.' What endures amidst the shifting currents of existence, and what emerges from the depths of obscurity and intensifying polarisation?

When exploring the concept of disappearance, the scholarly works of Ackbar Abbas readily surface, suggesting that Hong Kong is a self-invented 'space of disappearance.' This analysis of effects is evident in his seminal work 'Culture and the Politics of Disappearance' (1997)<sup>1</sup>. This transformation intricately connects with dynamic shifts highlighting the complex interplay of culture, society, and politics in Hong Kong.

Exploring another facet of disappearance, 'silence' takes centre stage in Andrea Riemenschneider's work 'Unleashing the Sounds of Silence: Hong Kong's Story in Troubled Times' (2021)<sup>2</sup>. She investigates the ways artists utilise silence, absence, and negative space as resilient strategies to contemplate social change and transformation. She notes that 'in response to the various factors contributing to the ongoing silencing of the city's critical

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<sup>1</sup> Abbas, Ackbar. *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Riemenschneider, Andrea. 'Unleashing the Sounds of Silence: Hong Kong's Story in Troubled Times'. *Zurich Open Repository and Archive: University of Zurich*, 2021 (1), 29–51.

voices, many artists, directors, and writers have turned to (absent) sound as the aesthetic signifier of the socio-political turn from hope and reconciliation to despair.' (Riemenschneider 2021: 29).

Now arriving at its tenth chapter, this new edition of 'Homeland in Transit' in Freiburg stages a multi-dialogue of voices from Hong Kong, Taipei, and the Diaspora. Co-curated by Heidi Brunnschweiler and Angelika Li, this chapter aims to explore the concept of sound and listening as articulated by sound theorist Brandon LaBelle in his book 'Acoustic Justice' (2021)<sup>3</sup>. His insights provide inspiration for this auditory journey of 'Homeland in Transit,' immersing into the understanding that the rights 'to be heard' and 'to listen' form the foundation of an equitable society. It serves as 'a poetic and slow energy' (LaBelle 2021: 46), taking root in an ethos of radical openness, where sound and hearing resonate to create an acoustic domain—a realm wherein a diverse tapestry of voices converges, and echoes resonate in unity.

In the wake of vanishing, do we find a panorama aglow with radiant visions and newfound clarity and hope?

雲開霧散卻晴霽，清風淅淅無纖塵。

宋·陸佃《贈王君儀》詩

The clouds part, the mist scatters, light coming through from a clear sky;  
the gentle breeze rustles, free from the tiniest speck of dust.

Lu Dian (1042-1102), Song Dynasty

## Opening Performance | Installation

Hedy Leung  
Sogetsu Ikebana 202200080026, 2023

Since 2021, more than 160,700 Hongkongers have settled in the United Kingdom<sup>4</sup> after the launch of the BN(O) visa by the British Home Office.<sup>5</sup> Drawing inspiration from her recent migration journey from Hong Kong to London, Hedy Leung has created a series of vessels titled '202200080026' (2023), embodying diasporic sentiments. The artwork derives its name from the title format found in her visual ikebana diary and personal journal, making it a fitting record of her transition from her homeland to a new destination.

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<sup>3</sup> LaBelle, Brandon. *Acoustic Justice. Listening, Performativity, and the Work of Reorientation*. London et. al.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> 105,000 Hongkongers start new lives in UK since BN(O) visa scheme began 2 years ago by [Laura Westbrook](https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3211282/more-105000-hongkongers-start-new-lives-uk-bno-scheme-began-2-years-ago). Published: 23 Feb, 2023 <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/3211282/more-105000-hongkongers-start-new-lives-uk-bno-scheme-began-2-years-ago> (cited 31 Aug, 2023)

<sup>5</sup> Gov.uk. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/welcome-a-guide-for-hong-kong-british-national-overseas-visa-holders-in-the-uk> (cited 20 Aug, 2023)

Hand-constructed, the vessels are fortified using packing materials. The first layer comprises sheer papers received from a logistics company, followed by newsprint wrapping papers forming the second layer. Strengthening the final layer are newspapers collected from an ikebana shop where she sourced materials from Japan. To further infuse the artwork with the spirit of her journey, the artist dyed the newspapers using the iconic Hong Kong Red-White-Blue bag colours.

Originating in Hong Kong, the striped polyethylene laundry bag gained prominence in the construction sector. Eventually, it evolved into a carrier bag, frequently used to ferry essentials from Hong Kong to mainland China in the 1970s and 1980s. This bag met the practical needs of migrants due to its affordability and widespread availability and it has transplanted around the world with different new identities.<sup>6</sup>

In the opening performance, as the artist interacts with the green materials and vessels, she invites the audience to reflect on the essence of ikebana—to live in the moment. The vessels encapsulate memories that document Hedy's personal and emotional journey, gently reminding us to cherish what is precious.

Hedy's artistic approach, where water is absent from this performative installation, symbolises the natural course of life, which may not always align with societal norms or our personal expectations. Over time, the green materials will naturally fade and wither, serving as a poignant reminder of the impermanence of all things, including life itself. Throughout the exhibition, these green materials will remain preserved within the artwork, inviting viewers to observe the ikebana arrangement in transformation of the moment.

**Galerie I**  
**Isaac Chong Wai**  
**Traces in Silence, 2023**

The political and performative qualities of Isaac Chong Wai's artistic practice are anchored in an interdisciplinary approach processing the exigency of societal shifts and global phenomena.

In 'Traces in Silence', Chong confronts the imposed silence on individuals and the wounds in public spaces. Through performance, materials, and the physical traces left behind, the vulnerability of the body is faced with the weight of history and the violence of weaponry. Working with touch and its transformation, the artist sets out to build a relationship of proximity attempting to bridge the temporal, spatial and emotional distance inherent in historic events. By emphasising touch, Chong's presentation becomes a space of experience for exploring fragility as resistance. Referencing bullet holes in Freiburg as the starting point for his new works, the artist entwines the exhibition site with the urban space as a place of history.

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<sup>6</sup> Ling, Wessie. / *A Bag of Remembrance : A Cultural Biography of Red-White-Blue, from Hong Kong to Louis Vuitton*. European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry. editor / Regina Lee Blaszczyk ; Véronique Pouillard. Manchester, UK : Manchester University Press, 2018. pp. 283-301

The drawings 'Traces' (2023) and the glass installation 'Missing Space' (2023) capture the traces of bullet holes in Freiburg spanning from the here-and-now to the past where architectural imprints, the unknown injuries, and the silent body intertwine. The new series titled 'Muted Dimensions' (2023) invites the audience to hold a stone to draw on a glass panel where Chong has etched a rectangular shape in reference to an actual aerial bomb. From holding a stone, one of humanity's earliest weapons, to touching a bullet hole, the works reflect the relationships among weapons, scars, history and our present reality.

## **Galerie II**

**Winnie Soon**

**Unerasable Characters II, 2017-2022**

**Custom-software, projection on A4 papers**

Winnie Soon's pioneering project, the 'Unerasable Characters' series, explores the extensive state-enforced censorship through digital infrastructures. This series serves as a repository for silenced voices, with a particular emphasis on messages censored on Weibo, one of China's largest social media platforms. Soon's source derives from Weiboscope, a data collection and visualisation research project led by Dr. Fu King-wa from the Journalism and Media Studies Centre at The University of Hong Kong.

'Unerasable Characters II' addresses the tension between what is erased and what is unerasable. Soon uses custom software to compile and visually present 'real-time' erased text from Weibo in a grid format. Each censored text is deconstructed into a character-by-character display occupying a flashing unit, briefly on-screen for a duration determined by its original posting and disappearing time on Weibo. As these projected characters fade away on the blank white papers, the work transforms from a lively cacophony of voices into a silent and empty void. It raises the questions: Who were the writers of these characters? What were they expressing? Where do the 'ghosts' of the disappeared characters go?

Timestamps are essential for calculating the visible time of a censored message, revealing the time it was posted and when it was erased. As Soon puts forward, 'Time is processual. This metadata contributes to the poetic and aesthetic representation of the piece, visualising the invisible in a poetic way. Conceptually, it is also about our experience of time, and how time is mediated computationally. The interconnectedness of forces shapes our experience of time and our ability to act in a world both politically and artistically.'<sup>7</sup>

**Oscar Chan Yik Long**

**A Horror to the Eyes of All Men Seeking Faith, 2023**

**Site-specific installation**

'A Horror to the Eyes of All Men Seeking Faith' is a line from the script of the 1990 film 'The Exorcist III,' which was both written and directed by William Peter Blatty, as part of the

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<sup>7</sup> Winnie Soon. Unerasable Character I-III. Data Relations. ACCA. <https://datarelations.acca.melbourne/?entry=erasure-by-any-other-name> (cited 1 June, 2023)

antagonist the Gemini Killer's speech before he tries to kill the exorcist Father Paul Morning. This line also serves as the inspiration for the title of Chan's newly commissioned ink installation, created in situ for this exhibition. The topic dives into deep psychological and ethereal dimensions, accentuating the film's core message—faith and will—that the artist believes is more relevant than ever.

As one descends into the underground gallery, an immediate sense of an uncanny and eerie atmosphere takes hold, captivating visitors and drawing them into Chan's phantasmagorical ink installation, which completely reshapes the spatial energy. Based on the artist's interpretation of mythology, populated by fallen angels, monsters, and souls, tension is elaborately woven into a cycle of enigmatic activities across murals, textiles, and canvases, constructing a temple. Each element contributes to the atmosphere, fostering an immersive environment that incites the contemplation of the ways our beliefs and desires can both liberate and constrain us, shaping our experiences and perspectives of the world.

The notion of decadence and distortion takes centre stage in this cycle of work. The artist portrays the twelve fallen angels, alongside the demonic creatures, with a particular interest in depicting their degeneration process. Chan believes that the origin of this is from human greed and desire, often manifesting as acts of devouring other beings, creating disasters, and disregarding harmony or nature's course—all driven by underlying fear.

The painting 'Fallen Angels: Eve' reveals a complex interplay between gesture and psychology as Eve eliminates the creature from her own body. It portrays a gesture where the figure appears to cover others with her long hair, but simultaneously, also concealing a part of her voice, indicating a desire for dominance – a fear of not having enough power.

Ambiguous lines in societies often breed fear – 'the unknown' often drives one to silence their thoughts and actions. This is expressed in 'Fallen Angels: Adam,' where a blindfolded figure is depicted with the function of his throat disabled. Despite this, an eyeball in the mouth continues to observe, yet the vibration of fear continues to extend.

In the ending of the film 'The Exorcist III', the demonic soul was expelled successfully by faith and will. Chan further questions how faith can take a dark turn, evolving into horror when one strays down the wrong path, entangled by distracting noises and the blinding experiences of the world. This exploration leads to the ultimate existential question: 'Who am I?' This question might offer a guiding light, preventing individuals from being misled, lost, or disappearing into the shadows. It is within this polarity of light and darkness that the artist raises profound inquiries about balance and the potential for personal evolution or rebirth. These inquiries invite viewers to contemplate the intricate interplay between faith, adversity, self-discovery, and transformation, which are at the heart of Chan's thought-provoking work.

**Musquiqui Chihying**  
**The Camera (16), 2016**  
**Video 1'50"**  
**Original Soundtrack from Twice Global: Tzuyu's Official Apology**

In 2015, Tsuyu, a 17-year-old Taiwanese singer and member of the South-Korean girl band 'TWICE,' participated in a Korean TV programme called 'My Little Television.' During the show, each band member was presented with a flag representing their respective nationalities. Tsuyu received a Taiwanese, officially known as Republic of China, flag, which many Taiwanese people interpreted as a display of national pride. However, this seemingly innocuous gesture triggered a wave of social media harassment from across the Taiwan Strait.

Accusations began to circulate that Tsuyu was advocating for Taiwanese independence and violating the 'One China' policy, which asserts that Taiwan is a part of China. The story was also covered by the BBC which wrote that 'Beijing considers the island its province despite the two sides being ruled separately since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949.'<sup>8</sup>

In response to the controversy, many big corporations and TV stations in China cancelled TWICE's scheduled performances. This led to a rapid escalation of the situation as netizens initiated a boycott of all artists affiliated with the same record label, JYP Entertainment in Seoul.<sup>9</sup>

On January 15, 2016, Tsuyu's apology video was released on JYP's official YouTube channel. It accumulated over 6 million views within 2 days, and in the video, Tsuyu appeared in a helpless and distressed demeanor. It is worth noting that this incident might have had a slight impact on the Taiwanese presidential election day, which was scheduled for the following day.<sup>10</sup>

In 'The Camera (16)' (2016), Tsuyu's voice has a prominent presence. However, it's important to note that the lady appearing in the video is, in fact, a performer of the same age as the singer. She assumes the role of a cameraperson, engaging in an imaginative re-enactment of the filming process. Musquiqui Chihying takes an unconventional approach by reversing the camera's perspective and reconstructing the image from the subject's point of view. This invites viewers to contemplate what might have transpired on the other side of the camera lens. The artist's work investigates into the power dynamics at play between the camera, the cameraperson, and the subject. It explores the camera's dominant narrative power, which can function as a powerful ideological tool capable of violating the autonomy of the subject.

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<sup>8</sup> Taiwan election: How a penitent pop star may have helped Tsai win. Published: 18 January, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35340530> BBC News Online. (cited 1 August, 2023)

<sup>9</sup> Tzuyu's apology figures prominently in Taiwan elections by janee@ktimes.com. Published 16 January, 2016. [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2023/09/398\\_195588.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2023/09/398_195588.html) (cited 1 August, 2023)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Anson Mak  
The Back Wall, 2022  
Super-8 Film

Behind the curtains, Sam Chan, the seasoned Cantonese opera maestro and founder of Atomic Cantonese Theatre, grapples with the intricate task of confronting her fears and addressing a complaint against her, all within the context of Hong Kong's National Security Law, which was enacted on 30 June 2020. This ominous concern persists despite the resounding applause she receives for her performances on stage.

As the central figure in Anson Mak's experimental documentary, Chan channels her sorrow and disappointment stemming from current affairs through the sentimental classic Cantonese Opera piece 獨上西樓 'I Climb the Western Tower in Silence'. This timeless poetry by 李煜 Li Yu (CE 937 - 978), a distinguished Chinese poet and the last ruler of the Southern Tang dynasty (CE 937–975), was penned after his capture by the Song Dynasty (CE 960 – 1279) invader. In a bid to alleviate the suffering of his people amidst the ravages of war, Li Yu chose to surrender. Tragically, after two years in exile and essentially as a captive, he met his demise through poison on the orders of Emperor Taizong of Song.

At the same time, the story unfolds into a melancholic farewell scene, documenting the goodbyes exchanged between Chan and her fans, as well as her beloved Hong Kong. This is one of the many stories of people leaving from Hong Kong for the United Kingdom. In Mak's film, sound and voice create a sonic space in which the uncertainty of meaning and the precarious emotional feelings of Sam's experience can resound and be heard.

無言獨上西樓，月如鉤。  
寂寞梧桐深院鎖清秋。  
剪不斷，理還亂，是離愁。  
別是一般滋味在心頭。

南唐 李煜

I climb the western tower in silence, the moon like a sickle.  
Clear autumn is locked in the deep courtyard, where a parasol tree stands lonely.  
Sorrowful parting has cut, but not severed our ties.  
My mind is still wild.  
Separation  
leaves an aftertaste in my heart.

'I climb the Western Tower in silence' by Li Yu (936-978 CE)  
Southern Tang Dynasty

**Leung Chi Wo**  
**Only time can tell, 2010**  
**LED light, etched Plexiglas and C-print**

Using backlighting to illuminate photographs, the artist deliberately orchestrates an obscured view of the words 'Only,' 'time,' 'can,' 'tell' etched on four light boxes. This phrase is a remark from the late Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to Jimmy Carter, in reference to Hong Kong's 'One Country, Two Systems' policy and was quoted in a Legislative Council (LEGCO) meeting in 1984.

What is obscured from view are four of the hundreds of amateurishly plastered bullet holes the artist observed on the Neoclassical former LEGCO Building in Central, Hong Kong. The origins of the bullet holes remain undefined in mystery, often associated with World War II during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong and vaguely attributed to 'enemy fire.' This work also incites curiosity about the transformation of the void – the negative space created by destruction, later covered up with a different substance in its restoration. What is buried, taking its history and memory with it? What is the new material constructed for?

The building was originally the Supreme Court, designed by English architect Sir Aston Webb (1849-1930) and completed in 1912, holding a unique place in Hong Kong's history and power shifts. It witnesses the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984 and then became the LEGCO Building in 1985. Even after the 1997 handover of Hong Kong, the building stands as an enduring testament to colonial architecture in the city. Despite such witnesses to history, the Hong Kong Education Bureau declared in 2022 that 'Hong Kong was ruled by Britain during the occupation but was never its colony.'

Created in 2010, this installation prompts viewers to contemplate the role of time in revealing personal narratives and shaping the interpretation of the city's history and the collective memory of its inhabitants. Over time, how do historical events undergo reevaluation, reinterpretation, or new given context?

**Angela Su**  
**The Afterlife of Rosy Leavers, 2017**  
**Single channel video, 14' 35"**

Angela Su explores the interrelation between human consciousness and technology, often interweaving fictions and historical facts from film footage and games from different eras to construct a speculative dimension that may very well be truth, reality, or post-truth.

Narrated by the artist herself, whose interests encompass early-modern psychiatry, schizophrenia, and the multifaceted use of psychedelics in mental health treatment and political indoctrination, this pseudo-biographical documentary embarks on a captivating journey into the life of the artist's alter ego, Rosy Leaver. Her captivating experiences begin with her fascination with spirals, vertigo, and the enigma of mind control. The documentary further delves into her hallucinatory encounters with LSD, episodes of schizophrenia, followed by her active involvement with the Socialist Patients Collective (SPK). The journey



culminates in Rosy's audacious decision to upload her consciousness to the infinite domain of cyberspace, thus disappearing from the confines of the physical world and assuming a life as an animated character.

Central to this video is the recurring motif of spirals, the gradual sense of things slipping away possesses an entrancing quality, akin to a hypnotic trance, drawing viewers into a dreamlike state, echoing the sense of things gradually vanishing from view. Is it an unfathomable void, self-constructed utopia, or an inferno that Rosy Leavers, in her ethereal performance, daringly descends into? Regardless of the mystery that shrouds this journey, one thing is certain—she rises, resolute, and embarks on her quest once more, navigating the ever-shifting boundaries between the digital consciousness and virtual reality.

## **ARTISTS**

### **Hedy Leung**

Leung has a holistic approach to the balance of energies between human and nature. In her everyday practice, she explores the healing and revitalizing powers of sound, plants, and sogetsu ikebana.

### **Isaac Chong Wai**

The political and performative qualities of Chong's artistic practice are incorporated by an interdisciplinary approach, processing the exigency of societal shifts and global phenomena.

### **Winnie Soon**

Soon is an artist coder and researcher interested in the cultural implications of digital infrastructure that addresses wider power asymmetries.

### **Oscar Chan Yik Long**

Chan's artistic practice focuses on personal experience and explores the conditions of life, how individuals associate themselves with others, fear, mythologies and popular visual culture.

### **Musquiqui Chihying**

The filmmaker and multimedia artist Musquiqui Chihying explores the cultural and social identities constructed through the flow and circulation of audiovisual elements.

### **Anson Mak**

Moving image and sound artist Anson Mak is interested in urban redevelopment, queer culture and well-being in the forms of experimental ethnography and essay film.

### **Leung Chi Wo**

As a visual artist, Leung combines historical explorations with conceptual investigations in a modern urban setting.

### **Angela Su**

Su explores perception and imagery of the body through metamorphosis, hybridity and transformation. Her research-based projects materialize in drawings, videos, hair embroidery, performative and installation works.

## **HOMELAND IN TRANSIT**

Homeland in Transit is a series of exhibitions by Angelika Li. Through her move from Hong Kong to Basel in 2017, Li began to explore the complex and changing nature of 'homeland'. The exhibition series explores different narratives and aspects of 'homeland': with borders, history, memory, cultural identity, diaspora, displacement and beyond.