

Curatorial Statement

“Tale of the Wonderland”, a group exhibition that borrows *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), the Victorian fantasy novel written by Lewis Carroll, as the framework to construct a collective narrative of the 20 years of post-colonial Hong Kong. Having bid adieu to the colonial era, she was thrown into the rabbit hole, and in 20 years she had to re-learn how to position herself in face of an uncertain future. Her beliefs about her identity and understanding of reality collapse in Wonderland, as she approaches such identity displacement in terms of a fairy tale.

External factors have brought about profound physiological changes – her uncontrollable body at times enlarges and at times shrinks, to the point of drowning in her own tears. Despite being lost, she continues to show incredible courage in face of the Red Queen’s authoritarian rule, even challenging her arbitrary edicts. Then, suddenly, she wakes up – is everything a dream, or is it reality? Is this the “Alice in Wonderland syndrome”?

The exhibition is divided into eight chapters, each abstracting elements from the storyline of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Each chapter is represented by the works of eight respective artists, who employ different methodologies and diverse mediums to interpret and realise the respective ideas. The eight chapters are “White Glove” (Sarah Lai), “The Rabbit Hole” (Lam Tung Pang), “Drink Me” (South Ho Siu Nam), “Who in the World am I” (Isaac Chong Wai), “Pool of Tears” (Leung Chi Wo), “Alice’s Adventures” (Amy Cheung), “White Rose Red” (Chow Chun Fai), and “Books – A Speechless Goodbye” (Pak Sheung Chuen).

Chapter 1: White Glove

The exhibition opens with the painting by Sarah Lai, and ends with her video. In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the animal character of White Rabbit, who wears white gloves and waistcoats, symbolises the reversal of the order of things in which human beings are at the apex. This role reversal is accentuated by the sartorial detail of the white gloves, an accessory that signifies caution, professionalism, and high status. With a signature low-contrast pale palette, Lai depicts a hand in a white glove, waving. The gloved hand is devoid of warmth, ambiguous in intention: is the waving hand greeting, declining or bidding farewell? Through the iconography of the white gloves, Lai reflects on the hypocritical nature of colonialism, as well as the undecidability of politics. At the same time, Lai satirises Hong Konger’s idealised memory of the British rule.

Chapter 2: The Rabbit Hole

In *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice goes after the White Rabbit, falls down a very deep rabbit hole, and enters a fantastical world of magic and peculiar logic. “The Rabbit Hole” encapsulates the circumstances of an exit, and a difficult situation, while Lam Tung Pang’s work incorporates these ideas by creating holes and falling into oneself. In *Re-folding*, Lam revisits a self portrait executed ten years ago

whilst studying in the UK. The work resembles a folding screen, in which the artist upholds his empty palms, seemingly holding a cloud of air. Ten years later, Lam reinterprets this work by drilling holes on the wooden panels, visualising the bottomless voids accumulated in a decade of emptiness. Another work of Lam's is *The Sinking World No.6* (2015) made after the Occupy Movement, an elegant landscape on a wooden panel in which weightless human figures fall without gravity.

Chapter 3: Drink Me

South Ho's installation *Drunken Life Dying Dream* includes craft beer brewed by the artist, a wooden table split and recombined, and dim lighting from a spinning lantern. The work is a metaphor for people's divergent memories of the past. In *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*, Alice gulps down a bottle of potion labelled "DRINK ME" and shrinks to the size of a miniature humunculus. Ho uses the bitter-sweet taste of beer as medium, creating through the audience's drinking, sharing, interacting, and participating an atmosphere and communal experience. In addition, the artist has custom made a camera lens filter that contains the craft beer, transforming the tipsy state into a photographic eye to see the world.

Chapter 4: Who in the World am I

Isaac Chong Wai painted the phrase "Is the World Your Friend?" on canvas as a response to Alice's question to herself, "Who in the World am I?" in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The work originates from a traumatising attack by a stranger on the street in a foreign country, which led the artist to contemplate one's position in the society and in the world. Two other video works, *Falling Exercise* and *Help! Help? Help*, document the collective performances of falling and aiding. Through the cyclical processes of falling and standing up, and the reciprocal role of helping and being helped, Chong uses his performance art to investigate the formation of individual/group consciousness and the dynamics of societal norm. His new installation *Hong Kong and Hong Kong* induces the humming of the Chinese national anthem, in which a Hong Kong SAR flag is "frozen and suspended" in a resin crystal. How is it like to hold Hong Kong unchanged for 50 years?

Chapter 5: Pool of Tears

Leung Chi Wo's *Untitled Waterscape* is the artist's interpretation of the "Pool of Tears" in *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*, wherein Alice found herself floating in a sea of briny water, just to realise it is a pool of tears from her previously enlarged body. Leung captured the variably colourful surface of the Victoria harbor in different seasons and times of the day, recording the temporal and mnemonic impressions unperceivable by the naked eye. Leung's other work, *Before Sunrise*, is a set of 6 photographs that documents the artist's response to Yoko Ono's performance *Morning Peace*. Set to the accompaniment of *Im Abendrot (At Sunset)*, one of the Four Last Songs Richard Strauss wrote before his death, the artist and attending audience witnessed together the twilight of sunrise.

Chapter 6: Alice's Adventure

Having once experienced her own Alice adventure in Wonderland in a dream and subsequently created *Down the Rabbit Hole Taxi* (2004), Amy Cheung enacted a performance titled *72 Hours*, lasting the duration of three days starting from 30 June 2017, the day before the 20th anniversary of the handover of Hong Kong, until 2 July 2017, the day after. During the performance, the artist blindfolded herself and relied on the physical guidance of a different participant each hour to walk, trace and verbalise his or her respective narratives about self and society in the past 20 years, weaving individual stories together into a collective memory.

Chapter 7: White Rose Red

In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice finds three gardeners busily painting over white roses with red paint, concealing their mistakes from the cruel judgement of the Red Queen. Chow Chun Fai installs an artwork consisting of 2046 HKSAR flags, as a metaphor for the discolouration and distortion of reality in the authoritarian rule of the Red Queen. Also featured are signature paintings of Chow's that take their subject matters from local Hong Kong news reports, depicting scenes of iconic moments and speeches made by the various Chief Executives in the past 20 years, along with insightful subtitles.

Chapter 8: Books — a Speechless Farewell

While *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has long been categorised as children's literature, the book also opens up grounds for critical analysis in the field of sociology, political science and even gender studies, functioning as a satire on the Victorian society. The categorisation and censoring of books inadvertently reflect the dynamics of societal control and power structure. Pak Sheung Chuen's work *Adult Library Series: LXB* is a continuation of the *Adult Library series* executed during Pak's ACC residency in New York in 2008. The artist sees the listing of the year of birth and year of death of an author in the library system as a metaphorical memorial to an author. Pak's work thus acts as a commemorative gesture to the recently deceased social activist/poet, Liu Xiaobo, while reflecting on the definition of "banned books", as well as the porously indefinable and permeable border between Hong Kong and China.

The 8 featured artists began their conceptual creation at the intersection between realism and fantasy, reflecting on the coexisting dialectics of self and collective, power and freedom, reality and fiction, and past and future. As the Encyclopedia Britannica commented, "*Alice's Adventure in Wonderland* improved none, delighted all."