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SOUTH HO SIU NAM, *Drunken Life Dying Dream II*, archival inkjet print, 80 × 100 cm or 120 × 150 cm. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

TALE OF THE WONDERLAND

GWYNETH WONG
BLINDSPOT GALLERY

HONG KONG

The group exhibition “Tale of the Wonderland” at Hong Kong’s Blindspot Gallery was an ambitious endeavor to construct a collective narrative of the post-colonial Hong Kong. Its eight artists appropriated Victorian author Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) to show how Hong Kong has been plunged into a future of uncertainty 20 years after its transition from British to Chinese sovereignty. Many of the city’s denizens now question their identity—some reminisce about the colonial times, and many others remain skeptical of the Chinese government’s rule. Hongkongers now often feel displaced, much like Alice as she navigates new, unknown lands. At Blindspot, each artist delivered a chapter of the show by drawing on a significant element from Carroll’s story.

For instance, the White Rabbit is ever in a rush, but always professional and dressed smartly in a black waistcoat. Sarah Lai references this character in her oil painting of Queen Elizabeth II’s hand in an elegant white glove, leaving the audience with questions about whether the monarch is waving goodbye or hello. Lai satirizes Hongkongers’ idealization of the British rule, and also evaluates the dubiousness of Hong

Kong's future, as well as a romanticized notion of the colonial era perpetuated by some Hongkongers' nostalgia for a British presence in the port city.



SARAH LAI, *White Glove*, 2017, oil on canvas, 150 × 114 cm. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.



LAM TUNG PANG, *Re-folding*, 2017, acrylic, metal and UV printing on plywood, 210 × 150 cm. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.



SOUTH HO SIU NAM, *Drunken Life Dying Dream*, 2017, installation with variable dimensions. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.



ISAAC CHONG WAI, *Question #1 Is the World Your Friend?*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 70 × 50 cm. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

Just as Alice chases after the White Rabbit and ends up tumbling down the rabbit hole, Lam Tung Pang takes on the second chapter with his work *Re-folding* (2017) and takes us further into Alice's exploration of the unknown. The work is a wall-mounted installation in which the artist's self-portrait is painted with acrylic on squares of plywood that are hinged together. Here, the artist's chest is hollowed out, signifying what the artist sees as two decades of emptiness after the handover—Hongkongers in favor of colonial rule compel themselves to fill that void with old memories of the past, unpacking a diminishing sense of belonging in the city.

South Ho takes on the third chapter, "Drink Me", referencing a potion that Alice drinks to change her size. The artist's multimedia installation *Drunken Life Dying Dream* (2017) includes a wooden table that has been split and recombined, craft beer brewed by Ho himself, lampshades made from bamboo baskets and two framed photographs. The booze comes in two variations—a sweet "Drunken Life" and a bitter "Dying Dream," and is meant to facilitate a communal experience. Ho's double-exposure photographs create a visual metaphor, as the beer's foam covers Hong Kong's skyline, as if the city is intoxicated. These images show the alterations to the fragrant harbor's iconic skyline, paralleling the changing political atmosphere of Hong Kong.



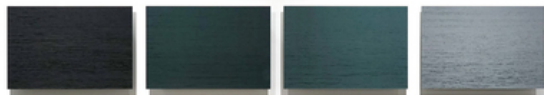
ISAAC CHONG WAI, *Falling Exercise*, 2016, video: 3 min 6 sec. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

In the next chapter, Isaac Chong Wai's *Question #1 Is the World Your Friend?* (2017) counters Alice's question, "Who in the world am I?" As Alice's exploration of the fantasy world progresses, she grows increasingly uncertain of her identity. Similarly, Chong questions the relationship of individuals to each other and their environment. The artist demonstrates the powerlessness of the individual in the face of collective change—his video work *Falling Exercise* (2016) shows a group of performers falling into one pile at the same time, with whoever is at the bottom attempting to get up and leave, highlighting the immense obstacles that one must overcome when going against the flow. His second video work *Help! Help? Help.* (2016) illustrates the process of helping others and being helped, in an investigation of the power dynamics of modern society. In his new installation *Hong Kong and Hong Kong* (2017), the Special Administrative Region's flag is encased in red resin. It is, for now, sealed away, but will it remain in this state forever? Here, the artist interrogates the future after 50 years of "One Country, Two Systems," which is a policy designed to preserve the way of life in Hong Kong for half a century after the handover of sovereignty in 1997.



ISAAC CHONG WAI, *Hong Kong and Hong Kong*, 2017, crystal, flag, paper, 19.9 × 26.4 × 8 cm; soundtrack: 2 min 49 sec. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

Leung Chi Wo's *Untitled (Grey Water 2014)* and *Untitled (Gold Water 2014)* (both 2017) bring us to the fifth chapter, which references the episode where Alice finds herself floating in a sea of her own tears. Leung captured the waterscape of Victoria Harbor in different seasons and times. The variations on the water surface of Victoria Harbor are normally not even an afterthought, but Leung captures specific moments and presents them side by side. Leung chose to document the Harbor as a representation of Hong Kong, with its changing colors paralleling the many minute shifts in the city—politically and socially—that many may not realize are taking place.



LEUNG CHI WO, *Untitled (Grey Water 2014)*, 2017, archival inkjet print, set of four, 31.5 × 48 × 3.5 cm each. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.



LEUNG CHI WO, *Untitled (Gold Water 2014)*, 2017, archival inkjet print, set of four, 31.5 × 48 × 3.5 cm each. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.



AMY CHEUNG, *72 Hours*, 2017, video installation, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

In Amy Cheung's video documentation of her performance *72 Hours* (2017), which took place from June 30 to July 2, 2017—overlapping with the 20th anniversary of the transition of Hong Kong from British to Chinese rule—Cheung blindfolds herself, relying on physical guidance from strangers to navigate the city. The video includes narration of their stories, and these personal tales are woven together to chart the collective memory of the port city in the past two decades.



CHOW CHUN FAI, *Painting 2047 White Roses Red*, 2017, flags, acrylic frame, printed card, 22 × 25 × 25 cm. Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong.

Looking to the city's future, Chow Chun Fai painted 2047 copies of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's official flag in *Painting 2047 White Roses Red* (2017), calling back to Alice's encounter with three card minions who were brushing red paint over white roses to avoid the Red Queen's wrath. Elsewhere, his signature paintings quote frames from Hong Kong news reports, detailing iconic moments involving political figures, with subtitles indicating the incidents cited by the artist, suggesting a deformity of Hong Kong's core values—freedom, rule of law, democracy, human rights and freedom of speech—and how they will be threatened under authoritarian rule in the future.

The group exhibition has successfully adapted a fantasy world into a physical embodiment of commentary on Hong Kong's current societal problems. "Tale of the Wonderland" wove together fantasy and reality, and the artists involved continue to reflect on the strain between power and freedom, past and future.



Installation view of "Tale of the Wonderland" at Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, 2017. Courtesy Blindspot Gallery.

"Tale of the Wonderland" is on view at Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, until November 11, 2017.

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