



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Gritty Eye” by Lai Lon Hin

23 May – 30 Jun 2018

Opening Reception: 19 May 2018, Saturday, 4 – 6:30pm

Artist will be present.

Venue: Blindspot Gallery (15/F, Po Chai Industrial Building, 28 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong)
Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 6pm (Sunday and Monday by appointment only);
closed on public holidays

Lai Lon Hin uses his mobile phone as his only photographic tool to capture everyday surroundings and happenings. Often close-up and incognito, always prying and snapping, Lai forces his personal vision and perspective upon the viewer in a nearly hysterical manner. The artist detaches the subject from its original setting through framing and enlargement, creating painting-like images that are extremely flat, low-resolution, low-contrast and soft-coloured. These images are released from one's blind spot, and expose the indeterminacy in visual media between the “real” and the “unreal”, the representational and the abstract; they also attest to how our perceptual experiences are manipulated by the process of viewing. These banal images may be playful, yet they mask a sense of discomfort that stirs or even stings the viewer.

In the very beginning, the viewer comes face to face with a light box image of a man's close-up gaze. The face is frontal and symmetrical, and the stare is intense and direct. One cannot but register a sense of profound yet uncanny familiarity: the staring gaze is photographed from a government-issued anti-smoking life size cardboard cutouts that widely populate the city. Along with another front-gazing portrait at the end of the exhibition, the tension of being watched becomes an echoing sensation. To gaze and to be gazed at, these are complementary and innate drives hardwired into our psychological systems. It structures our positions and relationality in the world, and is the irrefutable affirmation of our being.

Lai's practice is in and of itself a series of visual studies, wherein forms, colours, texture and scale become elements liberated from our constant seeking of information. Through zooming in, cropping out, and removing objects out of its

context, images achieve an autonomy through association, relationality and contrast. For instance, a nasal nostril allows the passage of air, but a shoe filled with sand has no more space for a foot. Pedicure stones contort toes into comfortable submission, but an equally cramped tooth guard functions by conforming to the shape of the jaw. In an object-body study that discards equivalence and analysis, the artist proposes a perceptual sensitivity through tangential logic, lateral thinking and spontaneous encounters.

Lai's images also go beyond the definitions of truthful representation and the appropriation of ready-made and found images. For instance, his images constantly straddles the ambiguity between "real" or "fabricated". In *Caterpillar's lunch*, a flower seems to be plastic and artificially purple. However, viewers see that the petals show a geometric pattern of holes eaten by worms, proving its actuality. The origin of his images can also be dubious and fictional. The large-scale wall sticker, *The Four Who Ran Forwards*, shows disproportionately post-edited figures running in a grass field with an equally synthetic elation, which the artist had re-photographed from an advertisement. An adjacent image shows real human hands reaching out gratifyingly to touch the fake flora decorating the flanks of a pedestrian conveyor belt. Another neighboring work, *Preparations Before Travel*, is a found image showing a classroom of orange-uniform-clad domestic helpers in training, a staged scene pervaded by an artificial air of cheery eagerness. Lai shows that just as staged scenes, synthetic flowers and false grass elicit genuine sensations, the photographic representation could not ascertain all the complexities of the objective world. Artist and viewers alike derive meaning in photography through their generatively subjective interpretations.

After all, Lai's quotidian photography is a practice of empathy, conferring upon objects and subjects alike a rich interiority and room for understanding. A woman clutches her face in fatigue, while another detaches the heels of her stilettos in relief. A child hurls herself dejectedly on a playground swing, while another schoolkid strains his neck to catch some sleep in the school bus. The artist neither dismissingly smooths out nor heroically hyperbolises these idiosyncratic moments of oddities or malfunction. Rather, he duly acknowledges that the exhaustion of the individual will is a common condition, that temporary collapse and comatose can be a restorative position against the drudgery of collective striving.

Passing through an entryway composed of two palms facing each other, the viewer reaches the projection of a screen saver, *Linda*, with the moving portrait of a neutral, automatic, eerily symmetrical face of a forward gazing woman. In fact, the face is perfectly symmetrical, because one side of the face was horizontally flipped along the midline to create an ideal advertising image found outside an instant passport photo booth. Despite the large scale of the video projection, Linda's face is small, and the viewers have to focus and follow Linda as it moves across the screensaving field. By enforcing a one-to-one viewing relationship, *Linda* demands an active gaze from the viewer and subverts the relaxation intended by a screensaver programme, heightening the viewer's awareness of its own objectivity.

The artist will be present at the opening reception. Interviews are welcome and can be arranged.

About the Artist

Lai Lon Hin (b. 1982, Hong Kong) has been practising photography since the early 2000s, including a focus on the material of instant film. In 2013, he discontinued the use of professional cameras, turned his focus exclusively to the phone camera, and has since ceaselessly published his works on social media. Lai has participated in several group exhibitions, including "Inside China [Journées Thématiques]" (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2015); "Hong Kong Photography Series 2: City Flâneur – Social Documentary Photography" (Hong Kong Heritage Museum, 2010), and Pingyao International Photography Festival (China, 2008). His work is collected by Hong Kong Heritage Museum and M+ Museum. He was also an editor for the art magazine KLACK. In 2018, he published his first monograph *Teleportation*. Lai currently lives and works in Hong Kong.

About Blindspot Gallery

Set up in 2010, Blindspot Gallery is a Hong Kong-based contemporary art gallery. The gallery began with a primary focus on contemporary photography and image-based art, and has evolved to include diverse media in contemporary art. The gallery represents both emerging and established artists, mainly from Hong Kong and the region but also beyond.

For enquiries and media interviews, please contact Ms. Lesley Kwok at 2517 6238 or by email info@blindspotgallery.com

Image caption:

Lai Lon Hin, *Linda*, 2018, Screensaver programme, size variable, Edition of 3 + AP. (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery)