



From Current Issue

[EDITOR'S LETTER](#) Ways Of Marking Time

[REPORTS](#) Pyongyang

[PROFILES](#) Kim And Lito Camacho

[FEATURES](#) Shen Xin, Ramesh Mario Nithiyendran,
Mountain River Jump, Zadie Xa and Waqas Khan

[REVIEWS](#) Manila Biennale

[REVIEWS](#) Raden Saleh And Juan Luna

[Table of Contents](#)

[Web Exclusives](#)

[Archive](#)

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Installation view of **LAI LON HIN**'s "Gritty Eye" at Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, 2018. All images courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery.

GRITTY EYE LAI LON HIN

WEB REVIEW BY PAMELA WONG
BLINDSPOT GALLERY

HONG KONG

Lai Lon Hin plays on our perceptions of quotidian life by heightening our senses. Initially known for his snapshot aesthetic and Polaroids, the Hong Kong-based artist began taking obscure, low-resolution photos with his phone camera in 2013, posting the results of his practice to Instagram. The artist's first solo exhibition in eight years, "Gritty Eye" at Blindspot Gallery, showcased a total of 36 artworks in this vein, including photos and a screensaver video that critique media and subvert the documentary nature of photography.



Installation view of **LAI LON HIN's** Mr Chan (2018), acrylic light box, slide, LED light, 48.4 × 36.6 × 8.2 cm, at "Gritty Eye," Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, 2018.

At the entrance of the gallery was a lightbox-mounted photograph, from which stared out a pair of eyes. Mr Chan (2018) features a man's restrained face, vaguely smiling yet revealing little emotion. The stiff facial muscle resembles the artificiality of a robot, simulating a feeling of uncanniness. The eyes look steadily and directly at viewers. The politics of gaze, then, is effectively at work here: when a viewer looks at the work, Mr Chan stares back at them, uncomfortably reflecting the objectification.



Installation view of **LAI LON HIN's** Backed by Brilliance (2018), acrylic light box, slide, LED light, 48.4 × 36.6 × 8.2 cm, at "Gritty Eye," Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, 2018.

This photo, taken in 2013, is of a life-size anti-smoking cardboard advertisement, which features a life-size image of a man. The work contains several layers of appropriation, transforming the real-life figure from subject to object. The real Chan had ostensibly been photographed for the advertisement, and that image was printed out and posted around in the city. Lai then photographed one poster, printing it out and installing it within the gallery space to be subject to further scrutinization by viewers. This subversion of gaze is seen in another lightbox work, Backed by Brilliance (2018), showing only the silhouette of a person standing in front of a light box. As the viewers cannot see whether the subject is facing or turned away from the photographer's lens, the relationship between viewer and the objects is obscured, out of reach.

In his photography works, low-resolution pixels bleed into each other like watercolor marks on a page due to the effect of the archival inkjet print paired with Lai's careful editing in which he zooms in and crops out specific details in images. In contrast to the commercial aesthetic of professional Instagram photography, which feature extravagant flatlay compositions, the images appear more like the random photos taken when one accidentally touches the camera button.

The presentation of these images in the show also led viewers to think about the context of the depicted objects. *Gathered Troop in the Corner* (2016) shows a group of pixelated water bottles abandoned under a pipe, in the corner of a room. In the gallery, the photo was positioned in the bottom corner of a grey wall, merging the space in the photo and the gallery space into one. Another example is a group of photos showing objects in various states of exhaustion, from the tired Mickey Mouse doll lying on a bed, to an exhausted man resting on a beach and a young boy taking a nap near a window. While these images of figures resting or lying down might appear depressing, in fact this set of photos captures the full emotive spectrum of exhaustion, from the comical to the peaceful. Rather than forcing grandiose narratives onto photos, Lai instead tells the story by revealing the smallest and most mundane occurrences around him.



LAI LON HIN, *Gathered Troops in the Corner*, 2016, archival inkjet print on Hahnemühle paper, 60 × 60 cm.



LAI LON HIN, *Caterpillar's Lunch*, 2018, archival inkjet print, 60 × 60 cm.

Lai also comments on commercialization by assimilating textures seen in consumerist objects and by highlighting mass production through duplication. In *Caterpillar's Lunch* (2018), the tacky colors of the flower in the image brings to mind shopfronts or commercials selling plastic, artificial bouquets; however, the holes left by the caterpillars on the petals prove its authenticity. *The Four Who Ran Forwards* (2016), meanwhile, shows four athletic figures, resized in unusually large or small dimensions and running on a track. By copying and synthesizing these odd-heighted figures into one photo, Lai demonstrates how reality can be reshaped through digital media, and ultimately asks whether traces of originality and authenticity can still be found in assembly-line or cookie-cutter production. In an age where people are obsessed with high-quality images and videos, Lai celebrates the paradoxes and ambiguity between reality and falsification, and views the in-between with hazy eyes.

Pamela Wong is an editorial intern of ArtAsiaPacific.

Lai Hoi Lin's "[Gritty Eye](#)" is on view at Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, until June 30, 2018.

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