

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Is the World Your Friend?” by Isaac Chong Wai

29 January – 9 March 2019

Opening Reception: 26 January 2019, Saturday, 4 – 6:30pm

Artist will be present.

Performance will take place from 4:30 to 5:00pm.

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

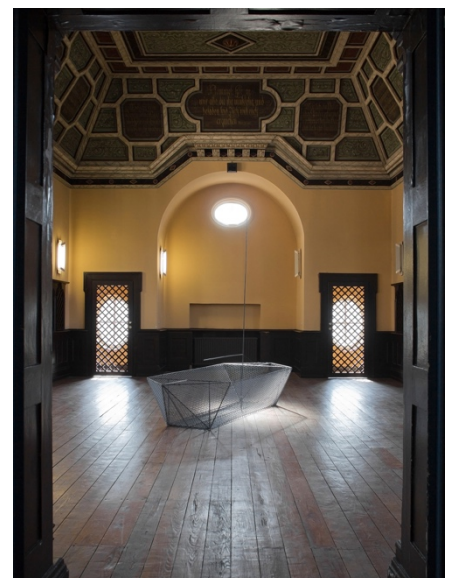


Isaac Chong Wai’s solo exhibition “Is the World Your Friend?” begins with the artist’s personal experience of being attacked by a stranger on the street of Berlin. With performance at the heart of his practice, the Berlin-based Hong Kong artist investigates how his actions could mediate trauma, intervene in violence, and even exercise reconciliation. The projects presented are made between 2013 and 2019, and address a breadth of related themes, including incarceration, border, victimization, oppression, and politics of space. “Is the World Your Friend?” articulates an almost naïve yet polarizing problem that permeates our personal lives and contemporary political discourse. Where we stand in the friendliness scale affects our views on immigration, multiculturalism, justice, and punishment. It is at once a rethinking of intangible relationality, a distillation of invisible violence, and an open-ended question that yields inconvenient responses.

Isaac Chong Wai was attacked in November 2015 on the street of Berlin, the city he lives in. A stranger started a conversation with him, but abruptly hurled racial insults and then bludgeoned his head with a glass bottle. The artist took this self-portrait as evidence of his injuries. A friend later cautioned him that “the world is not your friend.” In resistance to the definitive pessimism in his friend’s advice, the artist turns the negation into an inquisitive question.

In another work based on personal experience, *I Dated a Guy in Buchenwald* (2013), the artist asks his date François to write about their date at the Nazi German concentration camp. The resulting text is an affirmation of the goodness and warmth of humanity, a redemptive contrast from the horror of the camp and the hate crime the artist suffered later.

Incorporating works from 2013 to 2019, the ensemble can be loosely divided into four related themes: Prison, Borders, Reconciliation, and International Waters. In the Prison Project, the artist made a life-size boat out of segments of wire fences he cut out from a prison in Weimar. While the boat is made out of penetrable metal fences and is thus futile as a transportation vessel, the artist dragged it across the city of Weimar back to the prison, charting a fictional path between geographical mobility and escapist fantasy. In *Haribo Wall – Gold (Under Construction)* (2017-2019), the transmutation of barrier-making parts takes a systematic breakthrough. By making solid blocks with a few hundred kilograms of Haribo Goldbären gummy bear candy, the artist invents a new material for brick making, thus wall building and boundary setting. This new material is sweet and recalls childhood palate, but durable, sticky, resistant to change and hard to dismantle. The bricks represent a uniquely soft power, evident in the mass-market distribution and global ubiquity of the



German candy. They paradoxically embody a powerful penetrability and accessibility that even the hardest borders cannot stop.

Some boundaries take mobile and animate forms, like the policemen who move across the urban landscape countering the movements of protesters. In *Rehearsal of the Futures: Police Training Exercises* (2018), Chong choreographs the movement of uniformed riot police in a tortuously slow motion, imbuing their originally violent intentions with a paradoxical gentleness and beauty. These decelerated actions visualise the slow violence inflicted upon individuals by the collective power structures. This work was commissioned by M+ Museum as part of "M+ Live Art: Audience as Performer" (2018).



In *A selfie that celebrated a murder incident in the no man's land* (2019), Chong takes this temporal manipulation to a dysfunctional halt. Citing a video leaked online about a

brutal killing of anonymous men in the open sea, the artist screen-captured 91 consecutive still frames at the end of the video, when the perpetrators celebrated the incident by taking selfies with each other. These pixelated still images are laser-etched into separate glass blocks and displayed chronologically, like a row of memorials. Cast in a material reserved for awards, achievements and anniversaries, the



blocks amplify the celebratory mood of the selfie-takers, which complicates the narrative of that they are mere cold-blooded killers devoid of contexts and feelings. From his own selfie as a victim to the selfies of others as attackers, the artist turns his gaze from himself to the assailants, pitting himself against the evasion of justice, the lawlessness of international waters, and the banality of taking a selfie.

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

About Isaac Chong Wai (b. 1990, Guangdong province, China)

Isaac Chong Wai graduated from the Academy of Visual Arts at Hong Kong Baptist University with a BA in Visual Arts in 2012, and the Bauhaus-Universität in Weimar, Germany, with a MFA in Public Art and New Artistic Strategies in 2016. Chong works with diverse media, including performance, site-specific installation, public art, video, photography and multimedia. He transforms the tensions, intervention and interactions of human bodies into a microcosm of human relationality in social systems. Strongly influenced by personal events and global phenomena, he engages themes of collectivism and individualism, politics of time and space, border, migration, war, identity politics, LGBTQ, public sphere and human rights.

His recent solo exhibition includes "Chapter A: The Rehearsal of the Futures" (Apartment der Kunst, Munich, Germany, 2018), "Chapter B: An Artistic Archive of Borders" (Kunstraum München, Munich, Germany, 2018), and "What is the future in the past? And what is the past in the future?" (Bauhaus Museum, Weimar, Germany, 2016). In 2018, Chong was commissioned by Hong Kong M+ Museum to produce the performance work *Rehearsal of the Futures: Police Training Exercises*, which was performed as part of the "M+ Live Art: Audience as Performer" project. His recent group exhibitions include "The D-Tale: Video Art from the Pearl River Delta" (Time Art Center, Berlin, Germany, 2018), "BERLIN MASTERS" (Stiftung Brandenburger Tor, Berlin, Germany, 2017), and "Forecast Forum" (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany, 2017). Chong currently lives and works in Berlin, Germany and 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 captions:

Isaac Chong Wai, *Self Portrait: the evening when I was beaten up by a stranger with a glass bottle*, 2015, Archival inkjet print, 40 x 27 cm, Edition of 5+2AP

Isaac Chong Wai, *I Made a Boat in Prison – A Journey to the Shore*, 2015, Archival inkjet print, 80 x 60 x 5 cm, Edition of 5+2AP

Isaac Chong Wai, *Haribo Wall – Gold (Under Construction)*, 2017-2019, Haribo gummy bears, 12 x 24 x 5 cm (each), installation size variable

Isaac Chong Wai, *Rehearsal of the Futures: Police Training Exercise*, 2018, Dual-channel Video, 18'02", Edition of 5+2AP

(Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery)

Supported by:

