

Saan Dung Gei: An On-site Reader

read·er

/ˈrēdər

noun: **reader**; a book containing extracts of a particular author's work or passages of text designed to give learners of a language practice in reading.

After five years of fortuitous withdrawal from conventional spaces to play with seemingly never-ending art-in-progress in the streets, hotel rooms, and heritage sites, Lam Tung-pang has pushed the boundaries of how an artwork is made and shown, stimulating the evolution of audience's experience of art presentation through his creations.

Saan Dung Gei is a visual reader challenging the viewers' perception and the artist's own medium. Facing the two entry points at the front of Blindspot Gallery, one can easily be convinced that either side should be the beginning of the show and the other side should be the end. Lam, on the other hand, has constructed this three-dimensional medley where only after some pondering does the audience see the story's intricate parabolic contour, one that alludes to a fate of perpetual doom and no return.

Developed from the artist's previous experimentation, reading is part of his ongoing revelation in building a narrative, commanding the visual work to be perused instead of it just being seen. While the exhibition is referred to as a long form novel, the naming of the central character, "Eye", gives away that the show remains rooted in the ocular sense; it demands active participation of the mind from the viewer, as one would engage in a text.

That's probably how Lam made his start. On November 2, 2018, he took the recently inaugurated high-speed railway from Hong Kong to Beijing. During the eight-hour journey, there was a 20-minute ride through a dark tunnel in Hong Kong's territory. On this brief ride through the black hollow, Lam's usual optimism yielded to a magical realist vision of anxiety and social unrest that gave birth to the title of this work, which literally translates to "the mountain hole notes."

In declaring his work "the first novel on how Eye lost and found the manuscript," the artist accentuates the volume of time that manifests in searching and forgetting. It might be Lam's way of leaving hints. Known for his colorful and playful assemblage of images and objects, his newest work embodies a bleak, brutal blast at the present moment that marks a departure into a personal, dusky confrontation with a haunted land.

Doctors operating on a landscape, an alien (or emergency rescuer), lighting matches juxtaposing bleached firework... Lam sees his city as suffering a monumental trauma. His yearning and desire to heal comes from a hope that is steeped in a sense of otherness—he foresees, or even wishes for an overwhelming force to intrude upon this place-to-be. It is an overarching feeling that surges within him, at a place interrupted, that pushes him back to the opposite side of possibilities.

Is the mountain sick and in need of a cure? Or is it just quacks trying for a quick fix? Different strands and plots come into view, weaving a raw, unpaved path into a world of chaos. *Saan Dung Gei* attempts to tell an epic tale of how an artist responds to his era with life. The 20 minutes of darkness on the train ride to Beijing might have passed in a blink, but it is eternity for the author who packs his novel with cues of reference, allusion and nuanced detail, revealing hints of an endless struggle between an old hope and a new disillusion.

Abby Chen

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