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Blindspot Gallery

During a recent high-speed rail journey from Hong Kong to Beijing, Lam Tung Pang felt a sudden jolt of anxiety as the train passed through a tunnel. Although he knew he was still in Hong Kong, he could only see pitch-black through his window, a visual disconnect that brought

Lam Tung Pang *Saan Dung Gei*

societal fears over the city's uncertain political future into sharp relief. This experience informed the artist's first solo show at Blindspot Gallery, titled "Saan Dung Gei" (Cantonese for "Cave Chronicles"). In new paintings, installations and moving-image works, Lam mines the symbolism of the tunnel to convey the collective sense of entrapment and disillusionment felt by many Hong Kong natives in the face of increasingly fraught relations with mainland China.

Designed to evoke a novel, the exhibition felt decidedly oneiric, with disparate timelines and images commingling in a hauntingly amorphous way. Potential meanings of certain works sometimes only became clear in retrospect as one moved through the shifting temporal, metaphorical and figurative landscapes in the space. For example, the cryptic *A Day of Two Suns* (2019), near the

gallery entrance, features four back-to-back looped projections featuring a bird and a shoreline on large paper screens. These layered shots appear to morph intermittently, as if revisiting the same place from various angles and moments in time, while the stools, tripods and miniature models of mountains and buildings placed in front of the screens add another dimension to the artist's play with scale and perspective.

One had to look close to see the various scale model figurines embedded within the works. *Cover #4* and *#1 – Saan Dung Gei* (both 2018), using Lam's signature medium of mixed media on plywood, each depict a mountain with a round tunnel near the apex rendered in acrylic and charcoal, along with a tiny human figurine affixed to the surface. A woman in a buttercup-colored suit is perched at the mouth of the tunnel in *#4*, peering out through black binoculars; *#1* is a mirror image of sorts, depicting an upside-down mountain, with a man in a gray suit reclining in the dark passage and drinking from a bottle of wine. In both, confetti-like, pastel-hued daubs of paint suggest a raging storm. Neither of the protagonists have obvious escapes from their respective tunnels, though they appear oblivious—a scenario with ominous overtones in Hong Kong, where there is a palpable fear of being caught unawares by creeping authoritarianism.

This sense of dread intensified as the isolation that permeated the front of the exhibition gave way to narratives of control and eradication, foregrounded in increasingly chaotic compositions. *Erasing* (2018), for example, features thick, overlapping strokes of ink, peach and powder blue vying for space on the plywood. Overlaid are images of figures poised with paint rollers as if in the act of creating these colorful strips, which almost completely obscure a portrait of a man in a gingham shirt. Lam added another layer to this meta-erasure by attaching to the plywood small wooden platforms on which miniature figurines "paint" over the two-dimensional characters. Elsewhere, the triptych *Landscape in Operation* (2018) depicts giant surgeons in masks and scrubs cutting into a scaled-down mountain. Lam's initial emphasis on the smallness of individuals trapped in their surroundings thus shifts toward collective action against other figures and forces, crystallizing the exhibition's central anxieties around ongoing individual and political struggles to navigate, construct and redefine reality.

Installed near the exit was *The Moment* (2019), a rotating projection that screens a video of a bird onto a small plywood rectangle positioned in front of the lens. At the end of each clockwise circuit, a gunshot sounds and a silhouetted flock scatters across the walls, simultaneously alluding to death and the freedom of flight. Sometimes the birds soar across a small set of canvases, collectively titled *Hope 2006–2018* (2019). These paintings feature off-white expanses of impastoed oil paint, with many of the pieces marred by charcoal markings and burnt matches, as well as the word "hope"—a parting gift from Lam, offering brief respite amid swirling chaos.

OPHELIA LAI

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LAM TUNG PANG
A Day of Two Suns
2019
Video projection on paper and objects,
252 x 867 x 640 cm.
Installation view of "Saan Dung Gei" at
Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, 2019.
Courtesy the artist and Blindspot Gallery.

