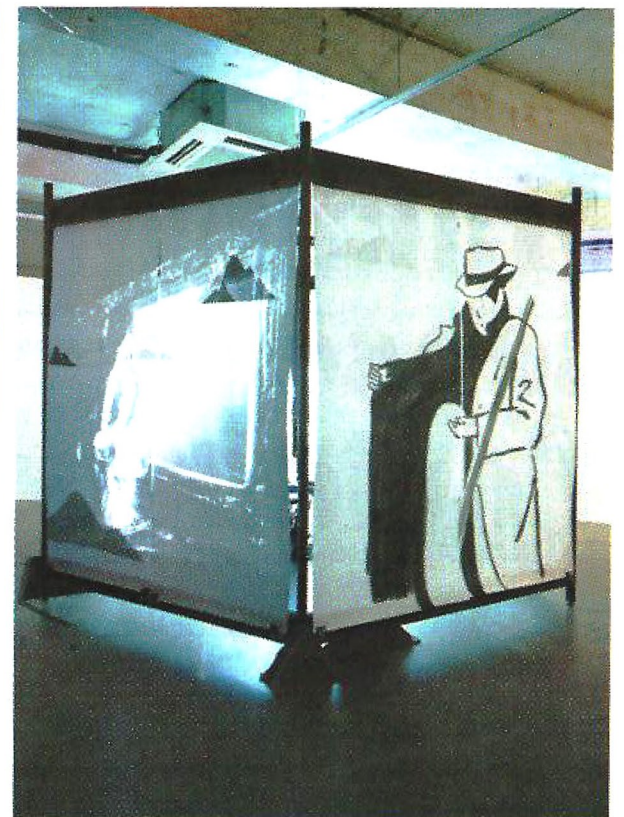




便也不再去打扰  
they left them in peace.



From left: a still from Wang Tuo's *Symptomatic Silence of Complicit Forgetting*; Lam Tung-pang's *The Great Escape*. Pictures: courtesy of Blindspot Gallery

THE COLLECTOR | ENID TSUI

## Magick show

*A new exhibition that explores the art of make-believe offers a much-needed escape from reality.*

Leaders around the world appear to believe in magic. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi asked his countrymen to switch off their lights for nine minutes at 9pm on a recent Sunday to defeat “the deep darkness” of Covid-19, prompting speculation that he was entrusting the battle against the coronavirus to numerology. And in the United States, President Donald Trump has been predicting the imminent arrival of cures and vaccines that will wipe out the pandemic like a wizard’s spell, despite experts’ warnings that any inoculation should be tested for at least a year before being used on healthy individuals.

Modi’s government has denied his lights-out call had anything to do with superstitious mumbo jumbo. As for Trump, he just says everything is “incredible”.

Science and magic are not always considered opposites. Ying Kwok, curator of an exhibition called “Anonymous Society for Magick”, using the archaic spelling, says magic is the belief that individuals can harness forces that exist in nature to make the seemingly impossible happen. We are not talking about reactions that require a PhD in chemistry, but a talent to draw out the “intimate essence which lurks in the inmost bowels of things”, as one 16th century Italian magician put it. Those “intimate essences” may well be consistent with scientific principles.

A 20th century proponent, Aleister Crowley, described the practice of magick as “do what thou wilt”. The British eccentric believed he could cause changes through sheer will and that keeping a scientific log would help refine these skills.

This esoteric pseudoscience may seem an unusual theme for an art exhibition, but

Kwok sees similarities between magic and art: both make the mundane extraordinary, stimulate sensations that go beyond normal perceptions and sensibility, and require precision and planning.

The exhibition, which will run at Blindspot Gallery, in Wong Chuk Hang, does not have a conjuror’s top hat or white rabbit in sight. Instead, all the works selected are to do with make-believe. Let’s focus on three of the larger works.

Hong Kong artist Lam Tung-pang’s *The Great Escape* (2020) is shaped like a giant Chinese carousel lantern. A small, rotating projector in the middle of a hexagonal structure projects a series of

paintings across white fabric panels dotted with small mountains – like a round, animated Chinese handscroll. There are images from fairy tales that Lam has read to his children, a photograph of Victoria Harbour and a single line of text: “We believe that we’re a nation / and the truth: we’re hardly a landscape” (from *Chile*, by Chilean poet Nicanor Parra).

The title of Lam’s work is liberating. It can be read as a Houdini-style breakout from Hong Kong’s political reality, a subject that has informed the artist’s recent, darker works. But is it about an escape from illusions? After all, this is an anti-magic kind of set-up. A traditional carousel

lantern, known as a “trotting horse lamp” in Chinese, is always sealed. The clever thermal mechanism that makes the figures go around is hidden from sight, the secret that makes it magical. But with Lam’s version, there is a wide gap between two sides of the hexagon where the projector can be seen, like “the man behind the curtain” in *The Wizard of Oz*.

The second work, a film by Beijing-based Wang Tuo, has two parallel narratives set in China, past and present. Don’t be fooled by the pseudoscientific title, *Symptomatic Silence of Complicit Forgetting* (2019). This is a ghost story. It seems to be about a nation haunted by unresolved historical trauma. A young soldier discovers an old book about a scholar who killed himself to appease his dead mother’s spirit. Later, a man dreams of seeing his mother singing Chinese opera on stage, years after he might have been complicit in her persecution during the Cultural Revolution.

The final work is Beijing-based Hao Jingban’s latest film, *Opus One* (2020). It follows a couple in China who are obsessed with swing and African-American culture, and who practise incessantly to get the moves right. The most interesting thing about the film is their self-questioning of whether it is acceptable to adopt someone else’s culture, to transmogrify.

As Crowley might say, “do what thou wilt”. It must be noted that most people don’t believe the world’s problems can be magicked away. Still, we all need to escape from reality sometimes. ■

*“Anonymous Society for Magick” is showing at Blindspot Gallery, 15/F, Po Chai Industrial Building, 28 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Wong Chuk Hang, until May 30.*



A still from Hao Jingban’s *Opus One*. Picture: courtesy of Hao Jingban / Blindspot Gallery