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Photo of **LEUNG CHI WO** sitting on the bed in Room 2, at "Home and Nonhome," Eaton Hotel, Hong Kong, 2020. All images courtesy Jockey Club New Arts Power, Hong Kong.



## REFUGE IN EXILE: LEUNG CHI WO'S "HOME AND NONHOME"

[WEB REVIEW](#) BY OPHELIA LAI  
EATON HOTEL

[HONG KONG](#)

I've always loved the sterile anonymity of hotel rooms. Here, I could be anyone. When I leave, all traces of me will dissipate in detergent and steam.

I love the fakeness of the hotel cliché: "a home away from home." It's not, but out of politeness the host and the guest nod and smile and agree.

Leung Chi Wo knew he wanted to stage his latest solo show at a hotel, plumbing its domestic pretensions for an inquiry into “the immaterial and vacillating notion of home.” The result is a conceptually powerful evocation of transitory stasis—of retreating to a place you eventually must leave, and being unsure of how the world will have changed by the time that you do.

At the Eaton Hotel, Leung transformed two adjoining guestrooms into separate installations that blend into the cramped but cozy interiors. In *Room 1* (2020), sleek white speakers proliferate, lining the TV shelf and cluttering the desk. Whispers emanate from every corner of the room, a sonic ectoplasm of those who might have stayed here. Holding the tubular speakers up to their ears, visitors hear humdrum recordings of people describing their living situations: an airline pilot adjusting to the small walk-up he moved into in 2005; a local photographer who listens to music while working in his living room.



Installation view of LEUNG CHI WO's (left) *Room 1* and (right) *Mickey*, 2020, stainless steel, vintage stuffed toy, dimensions variable, at "Home and Nonhome," Eaton Hotel, Hong Kong, 2020.

In the adjoining space, a Mickey Mouse plushie with a steel helmet lies on the bed, while a custom contraption on the neighboring desk flips playing cards so quickly that it is impossible to make out their images. A self-portrait of the artist's younger self is affixed to the bathroom mirror. These are emblems of nostalgia, recalling memories of outgrowing one's childhood treasures, of needing to leave things behind.

Footage of the bustling city streets shot from the hotel window plays on the TV as interviewees narrate their future plans and their feelings about Hong Kong. Whereas the sound installation in *Room 1* focuses on the experience of settling down, the video in *Room 2, Home and Nonhome* (2020), speaks instead of departure. "It feels [like] there is no choice but to leave although I would love to remain," one remarks. Another says her parents once considered emigration, but the mother didn't wish to abandon her extended family. Hong Kong's year of exhausting, scuppered protest is never referred to by name, but its shadow looms large: "It's hard not to feel the trauma of the city," one person notes, "Its color is grey or green."



LEUNG CHI WO, *Home and Nonhome*, 2020, still from looped HD video, color and sound: 39 min 20 sec.

Serif texts appear onscreen in interstitial moments of silence, sometimes reading as commentary on the class barriers that determine which Hong Kongers can leave. Other times they state the obvious—"Immigrants are different from displaced persons"—or provide historical context, delineating, for instance, the waves of emigration in the late 1960s and early '80s during periods of political uncertainty and unrest. *Home and Nonhome* presents the musings of immigrants, and Hong Kong is an immigrant city. Exit strategies are our instinct.

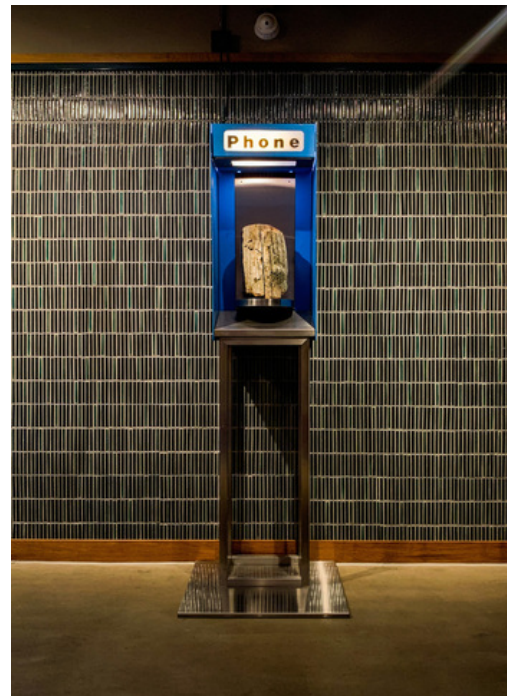
Personas from different timelines merge and overlap, illuminating the ways we have always lived—in a borrowed place, on borrowed time. In the downstairs lobby is an anachronism in the form of a blue vintage telephone booth, titled *Monuments of Solitude II* (2020). Where the telephone should be is a hunk of petrified wood, robbing the compartment of its function. The inability to make contact is apt, for the sense of bearing a loss one is powerless to stop is incommunicable. It is no solace that this anguished dislocation is shared by many—we are millions, losing together.

Leung clearly understands the comforting blankness of a hotel room when he asks in the curatorial statement, "What if 'home' becomes 'non-home,' and what if 'non-home' calms the shattering souls?" In a hotel, we can be anyone. We can forget we are citizens adrift in a place we no longer recognize. Let us rest here awhile, sequestered from the noise and stress and pollution outside. But then we will have to depart.

*Ophelia Lai is ArtAsiaPacific's associate editor.*

*Leung Chi Wo's "Home and Nonhome," presented by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council as part of Jockey Club New Arts Power, was scheduled to run at Eaton HK until December 11, 2020. Due to Covid-19, a virtual tour of the exhibition is now available.*

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Installation view of LEUNG CHI WO's *Monuments of Solitude II*, 2020, vintage outdoor phone booth, petrified wood, stainless steel stand, dimensions variable, at "Home and Nonhome," Eaton Hotel, Hong Kong, 2020.

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