

For Immediate Release

Leung Chi Wo: “Past-Future Tense”

23 May – 1 July 2023

Opening Reception: 20 May 2023; Saturday; 4:00-6:30pm

Venue: Blindspot Gallery (15/F, Po Chai Industrial Building, 28 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong)

Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10:30am to 6:30pm (Sunday and Monday, by appointment only); closed on public holidays.

Blindspot Gallery is pleased to present “Past-Future Tense”, Leung Chi Wo’s third solo exhibition at the gallery, continuing his articulation of an unprescribed history of Hong Kong across time. Leung’s recent research into the colonial history of Hong Kong introduces a new anchor point set in the year 1982 when negotiations commenced between the Chinese and British governments with regards to the handover of Hong Kong, prompting an unpredictable future for the city.

Leung explores the anonymities embedded within records of the past, facilitating the notion that anyone can become a part of history through reimagining a pre-dated future. In a historical encounter on September 22, 1982, previous British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher made her first visit to China where she met with the former Chinese Communist Party Leader Deng Xiaoping to discuss the future of Hong Kong following the handover year of 1997. Officials reported that the meeting had failed to reach a verdict but two years after, the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed.



Leung Chi Wo, *Gather The Tears*, 2023, Aluminum alloy frames, glass, craft knives, book, music stand, 137 x 62 x 62 cm (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

Surfing through real historical events that read like fiction, Leung investigates the contesting narratives of history. Rather than solely focusing on factual accuracy, he employs a unique approach of “self-searching” which embraces side-tracking and deviating attention from history’s grand narrative. Disparate timelines converge in the handwritten notes of Margaret Thatcher (derived from National Archives, London), the first official photograph celebrating the birth of Prince William, and archival footages from TV news. The result is a constellation of past events seen in a new rendition, opening up new possibilities for the interpretation of history, an antidote to the saying: “history is written by the victors.”



Leung Chi Wo, *Excellent Sun*, 2023, Found objects, mixed media collage, 46.8 x 39.8 x 4 cm (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

Excellent Mirror, *Excellent Sun*, *Excellent Daily* and *Excellent Star* are mixed media collages that stem from four different newspapers published on the same day – July 29, 1982. The cover of these newspapers unanimously feature the first royal family portrait marking the birth of William, Prince of Wales. The acrylic glass of the framed collages are engraved with Margaret Thatcher’s handwritten remark ‘excellent’ which she wrote on an official document transcribing a conversation between several British officials and a Chinese ambassador on the matter of Hong Kong’s handover. Thatcher’s poignant remark ‘excellent’ was written on the same day as the royal announcement but the affair remained concealed beneath layers of celebratory news.

Interwoven into these collages are different found objects. They include a set of stamps depicting the Chinese year of the dog, a booklet entitled *China Dairy* written by David Hockey after his visit to China, album covers of English new wave bands with the Sinophile names of Wang Chung (Yellow Bell) and China Crisis, and an Atari video game provocatively titled *China Syndrome*. Leung’s collages bind together materials and cultural signifiers that embody his contemplation of a future re-imagined from the past.

Leung’s latest video *My Random Diary 0*, and its prequel *My Random Diary* (2020) are conceived in tandem with his photographic project *Date Series* (2017-ongoing). The project began with Leung revisiting the locations where bomb attacks took place during the Hong Kong Riots in 1967. Exactly fifty years later, on the same date and location, the artist turns his camera upward and captures images of the sky on black and white film. When naming the individual photographs within the *Date Series*, Leung draws parallels between civil and personal events that happened on the day of the riots, accentuating the coexistence of ephemeral yet notable timelines under the same sky.



Leung Chi Wo, *Berlin*, 2023, Electric boiler, book, crystal, coin, postcard, stuffed toy, steel frame, 138.5 x 64 x 56 cm (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

Berlin is a sculpture that entangles diverse historical incidents, timelines and locations. The central component is a used water heater manufactured by a Hong Kong company called Berlin founded in 1967, the year the Hong Kong Riots broke out. A notorious bombing incident during the Riots took place in Hilton Hong Kong. In juxtaposition with this event, the artist makes a reference to the Hilton hotel in Berlin which was rumored to be a location for Central Intelligence Activities in the 1960s. to make a ticking sound as a reminder of the passage of time.

Another component of the sculpture is an open book entitled *What Price Coexistence?* written by John Slessor, with a piece of crystal pierced through its pages. Slessor was a former British Royal Air Force marshal, and his book came to light during the Cold War. Slessor radically proposes in his book a Hong Kong that is administered under the United Nations trust, similar to Berlin, hence envisioning an alternative future for the city. Interlaced with these elements are various objet trouvés including a Hong Kong five cent coin from 1949, an artificial flower citing the 1967 Hong Kong Riots which erupted in a plastic flower factory due to labour disputes, a 1960s teddy bear from Berlin, and a postcard sent from Hilton Berlin to Charles Hurl, an American soldier who fought for the Allies in Europe in WWII. Leung articulates parallel worlds in this sculpture which hark back to the *Date Series*: some which are temporally synchronous yet spatially distant, others which are temporally distinct but spatially unified. The Berlin water heater is further modified by Leung to make a ticking sound, evoking the passages of time.

The sculpture **Gather the Tears** stems from the artist's research into the colonial reports of Hong Kong from the National Archives in London, as well as the official memoir of Margaret Thatcher. Leung observes and conjectures that the future of

Hong Kong was deemed by the then-British government as no more than a drop in the ocean. Every sentence referring to "Hong Kong" in the memoir are meticulously cut out forming a long continuous strip, piled atop the book. The sculpture is reminiscent of a head of hair. Stabbed into the pages of the memoir is a crown of aluminum alloy, fashioned with six craft knives and two levels of dangling glass teardrops.

Yes, It Is Reasonable and **And if they are not obtainable?** are two prints on canvas extracted from news footages, both featuring Margaret Thatcher's hand in a gesture of writing. On the bottom corners of each canvas, Thatcher's handwritten notes, derived from archival documents, are enlarged by laser-engraving, and then coloured in by the artist. Thatcher's remarks "Yes, it is reasonable" made in 1980, was a response to the reinforcement of military garrisons in Hong Kong. Her other comment "and if they are not obtainable?", made in 1982, exposes her scepticism towards the continuation of the British administration in Hong Kong following the handover year of 1997. These are both remarks made by Thatcher shortly before her meeting with Deng in China on September 22, 1982.



Leung Chi Wo, *And if they are not obtainable?*, 2023, Laser engraving, acrylic, inkjet print on canvas, 32.5 x 59.8 x 2.2 cm (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

About Leung Chi Wo

Leung Chi Wo (b. 1968, Hong Kong) uses photography, texts, found objects, performance, and installation to combine historical exploration with conceptual inquiry, to reinforce our doubts about memory, power systems and the ambivalence of history. By synthesizing and collecting vintage objects, archival materials and images, Leung juxtaposes quotidian events with parallel moments of political instability. His research-based practice often addresses the fissures and ambiguities existent within historiography, and and proposes that history is written by those in power. His recent research has focused on the colonial history and postcolonial reality of Hong Kong.

In 2001, Leung Chi Wo together with his long-time collaborator Sara Wong represented Hong Kong for its inaugural participation in the Venice Biennale. Leung had his survey exhibition at OCT Contemporary Art Terminal in Shenzhen, China in 2015. His works have been exhibited at international museums and institutions including NRW Forum (Dusseldorf, 2015), the International Studio & Curatorial Program (New York, 2013), Tate Modern (London, 2010), Museu da Imagem e do Som (São Paulo, 2008) and Queens Museum (New York, 2000). Leung has also participated in the Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism\Architecture in Shenzhen (Shenzhen, 2017), Asia Triennial Manchester (Manchester, 2014), Marrakech Biennale (Marrakech, 2012), Guangzhou Triennial (Guangzhou, 2008), Shanghai Biennale (Shanghai, 2000).

Leung is also the co-founder of Para Site, one of Hong Kong's longest standing independent art institutions founded in 1996. He currently lives and works in 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.

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