

For Immediate Release**Blindspot Gallery to participate in Liste Art Fair Basel 2023
Presenting Isaac Chong Wai: “Breath by Breath”**

12 - 18 Jun, 2023

Liste Art Fair Basel | Booth 9

Messe Basel, Hall 1.1, Maulbeerstrasse / corner Riehenring 113, 4058 Basel, Switzerland



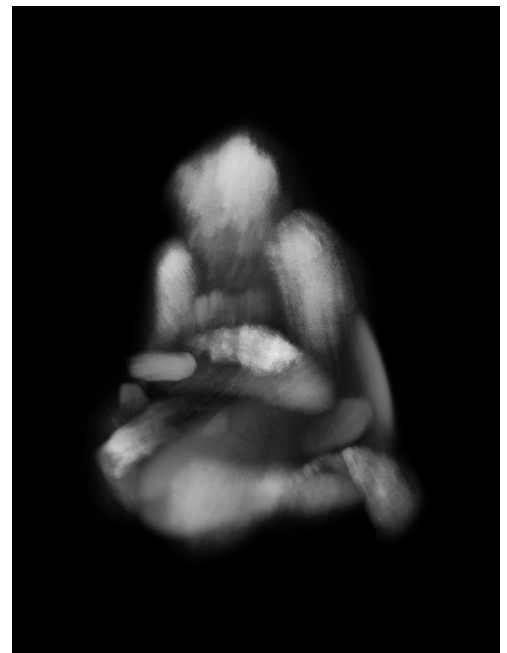
Blindspot Gallery is pleased to participate in Liste Art Fair Basel 2023, presenting a solo booth of works by **Isaac Chong Wai** (b. 1990) who is based between Berlin and Hong Kong. Influenced by personal events and global phenomena, he engages themes of collectivism and individualism, nationalism and postcolonialism, as well as historical memories. Chong’s presentation, entitled “Breath by Breath”, will center around the phenomenon when we breathe onto glass, the air fogs up the surface, leaving a blurry and ghostly mark that fades over time. Through photography, glass sculpture, and video, Chong memorializes the fragility and temporality of life, investigating our mourning and commemoration of it by considering “breath marks” as transient trails of the living. He traces breath marks across nations and histories, using his breath to contour the performance of sorrow and to conceal the memorial that is narrated by the state.

In Chong’s *Breath Marks: Queen Elizabeth II and Crying Hong Kong Girl* (2023), comprising a photographic print and a glass sculpture, the artist uses his breath marks to “paint” an image circulated amongst Hong Kong social media, of a young girl sorrowfully grasping photographs of the late Queen Elizabeth II. The girl bawls on the ground next to a public memorial outside the British Consulate in Hong Kong, placed in commemoration of the British monarch who had passed away. The crying girl received criticism amongst netizens for how she had no direct relations with the Queen and too young to have experienced colonial Hong Kong,

hence the ambiguity as to why she was so devastated. Using his breath mark as a paint brush, Chong delineates the contours of the crying girl. Breath by breath, stroke by stroke, the process is repeated until the outline of the mourning girl is “painted”.

The resultant image is turned into a photographic print. Each breath mark is also etched onto fourteen individual glass panels lined at varying widths from one another to form a glass sculpture. When the sculpture is viewed from the front, the “breath marks” stack together to reveal the abstracted silhouette of the crying girl. Through this work, Chong reflects on the ambivalence of postcolonial Hong Kong, the Queen being once the symbol of nostalgia for the colonial era, and the figurehead of a statecraft that afflicted discrimination upon its colonial subjects. The artist asks: what is the significance of mourning the deceased? How does it shape our understanding of the past, our identity in the present, and our imagination of the future?”

Transferring the collective mourning experienced on a national scale to the maternal grief of an individual, Chong questions the slippage between the mother figure of the nation state and motherly love in family kinship. In *Breath Marks: Mother with Her Dead Son* (2022), Chong shifts from the contemporary to the historical, creating another set of “breath-painting” photographic print and glass sculpture depicting an abstracted image of the sculpture *Pieta* by German expressionist artist Käthe Kollwitz. Kollwitz created the sculpture in 1937 to 1939 to pay tribute to her son who was killed in World War I; an enlarged version of the sculpture currently sits within Neue Wache, Berlin’s national memorial for the victims of war and tyranny. Chong channels the moving pathos of Kollwitz by using his breath mark as a paint brush, delineating the contours of her sculpture. Painted with an intangible material, an extension of the artist’s body, Chong gives form to the fragility of life, while staging a moving protest against the atrocity of wars, past and present.





Neue Wache (2015) is an earlier video work which shows Chong in front of a grand window that overlooks the rear façade of Neue Wache memorial (Berlin's national monument since 1993 for victims of war and tyranny). Chong repeatedly breathes onto the glass window until the view of Neue Wache is entirely obscured by breath marks. Stills from the video are extracted and turned into a series of intimate prints, inviting the viewer into quiet contemplation with the breathing artist. The clouded image of the national memorial spotlights the politics of memories and the malleability of state-sanctioned historical truths, pointing to the question of who gets to be commemorated and who is remembered as the perpetrator?

About Isaac Chong Wai

Isaac Chong Wai (b. 1990) uses public and site-specific performance, video, installation, and photography as mediators to investigate contemporary global phenomena. His work transforms the tensions, interventions, and interactions of human bodies into a microcosm of human relationality in social systems. His performances often tread the line between the individual and the collective, illustrating how vulnerability in an individual and solidarity in a collective are means to reconcile with historical traumas. Chong seeks to decentralize the representation of power and suggest instead a criticality in the way that we respond to history and politics. Chong currently lives and works between Berlin and Hong Kong.

Chong's recent solo exhibitions were shown at Museum Schloss Moyland, Moyland (2023); Una Boccata d'Arte, Fondazione Elpis, and Galleria Continua, Castiglione di Sicilia (2022); Zilberman Selected, Istanbul (2022); Bilsart, Istanbul (2021); Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong (2019). His works have also been featured in group exhibitions at Hamburger Bahnhof–Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart Museum, Berlin (2023); esea contemporary, Manchester (2023); Taikang Space, Beijing (2023); Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (2022); Kindl Museum, Berlin (2022); Bundeskunsthalle Bonn, Bonn (2022); Neues Museum Staatliches Museum für Kunst und Design Nürnberg, Nürnberg (2022); National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2020); IFFR International Film Festival Rotterdam, Rotterdam (2020); Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei (2019), and M+, Hong Kong (2018), amongst others.

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.

Interviews with the artists are welcome and can be arranged, please contact Ms. Helena Halim at +852 2517 6238 or by email info@blindspotgallery.com.

Captions:

Image derived from Isaac Chong Wai, *Neue Wache*, 2015, HD single channel video (no sound), 10'52", Edition of 5 + 2AP.

Isaac Chong Wai, *Breath Marks: Queen Elizabeth II and Crying Hong Kong Girl*, 2023, Archival pigment print, 162 x 122 cm (print size), Edition of 5 + 2AP.

Isaac Chong Wai, *Breath Marks: Queen Elizabeth II and Crying Hong Kong Girl*, 2023, Etching on glasses, 14 panels, wooden base, 43 x 30 x 43 cm, Edition of 3 + AP.

Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.