



Déjà Disparu

Pearl Lam Galleries

Cultural theorist Ackbar Abbas explains “déjà disparu” as: “What is new and unique about the situation is already gone ... and we are holding a handful of clichés, or a cluster of memories of what has never been.”

It is Abbas’ “culture of disappearance” that is this exhibition’s curatorial thread, but it is debatable whether the artworks actually fit this thesis.

What this show successfully displays are depictions of a claustrophobic Hong Kong. If socio-political or colonial

symbolism are shown, they are more implied than intentional.

This display curated by David Chan Ho-yeung features artists Ho Siu-kee, Ellen Pau, Vincent Yu and Sara Wong. It is welcome to see some of their 1990s pieces reprised.

Pau best captures the enclosure of Hong Kong space. *Diversion* (1990) recalls Roman Polanski’s psychotic *Repulsion* – with fleeting images of lemming-like cross-harbour swimmers jumping into Victoria Harbour, interposed with a figure smashing against a granite wall. *Recycling Cinema*, originally shown in the 2001 Venice Biennale, tracks monotonous traffic

plying the city’s Eastern Corridor highway.

Yu catches the city’s claustrophobia in another way. His black-and-white snaps show the nobility of residents inside their small, simply decorated



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rooms in one of Shek Kip Mei’s first public housing estates. Photographed in 2006 prior to the estate’s demolition, context is given by adjacent photographs of the official report outlining the 1953 Shek Kip Mei slum fire that triggered the resettlement of vulnerable hillside squatters.

Yu’s other photos of the Star Ferry, a caged home, Kai Tak airport and City Hall bring us closest to Abbas’ impossibly imagined Hong Kong.

Ho’s fine sculptural installations are always overtly physical, often depicting repetitive movement. His

Flying Machine measures both time, with its pumping gymnastic action, and the sudden periodic plunges of Hong Kong as Icarus.

Sara Wong’s absorbing video *Local Orientation* is screened in two parts, depicting two walks in Western district, in 1998 and 2013. The camera passes through King George V park, Shek Tong Tsui Market and Sai Ying Pun, towards Kennedy Town Praya – once busy with unloading boats and sea view; now a park with a nautical theme, built on reclaimed land.

John Batten

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