



Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

From Desires to Where?

Manit Sriwanichpoom
Weng Fen



Weng Fen
Sitting on the Wall - Guangzhou 2
100 by 80 cm, 2002
Edition of 10

18 September - 8 October, 2003

Curated by ARTAGENT

Presented and organised by Tang Gallery
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From Desires to Where?

On the face of it, this is a joint exhibition. Epitomized by a common conceptual element, the artists are interested in activating and uncovering fragments of social obsessions in everyday sites and situations, through their iconic figures in the photos as metaphorical tools. However, in terms of perception, the artists are also very different, both in terms of photographic strategy and perspective. Even though both deal with aspects of contemporary existence, the equally revealing visuals are mediated in the two artists' own situation of conflict.

Fresh from his participation in 50th Venice Biennale this year, the exhibition features Mani Sriwanichpoom's *Pink Man on European Tour* and the never-before-seen *Pink Man in Venice*. For Chinese artist Weng Fen, who also just participated recently in the 1st Prague Biennale, his works include *Sitting on the Wall* and *Bird's Eye View*. Sriwanichpoom engages with an universal phenomena by implicating an environment that neither belongs nor tainted by him. In contrast, Weng is interested in the apparently changing world of suburbia culture in his hometown, Haikou city, which is located in the small Hainan Island, away from the Mainland.

Among the many projects of Sriwanichpoom, Pink Man is probably the artist's most recognised artistic manifestation. Already immortalised in seven different series, this iconic figure - all tailored up in a signature pink suit - is always stepping into various narratives to 'perform' his role as a wandering symbol of consumerist greed and opportunism, a soulless subject, unburdened by memory or conscience.

Pink Man has been taken wandering into the financial district of Bangkok, wrapping in different Pink outfits of typical consumer lifestyle representations and also being digitally slotted into old archival images documenting the student atrocities in 1973 and 1976. Strategically placed in these different series, the eye-catching figure acts as a deliberate reflection in a search for meaning; infiltrating into the relationships between humans and their societal environment.

For this exhibition, the artist brought Pink Man to the faraway cities of the Europe. From Graz, Austria to Venice, Italy, this new series continues to infiltrate the tensions of the cities and its inhabitants in order to invoke the questioning of existing social obsessions, in alignment with the structuring and functioning of the urban society itself.

The two series presented allows us to peer into the abrupt change of narrative contradictions in the imageries. With his empty shopping trolley, Pink Man wanders and stood aimlessly into the streets of Graz amid the bustling activities and the residents who are seemingly oblivious to his presence. It is as if that he doesn't know what to do or how to react to such inescapable decor urban lifestyle. The scene is standard and unimaginative, standing as a superficial luxury that continuously disorients the yearning desires that today's mass-media has easily managed to lead consumers into.

On the other hand, the photos taken in Venice, devoid of a visible human presence, become theatrical surrealist nightmares. Holding himself against deserted concrete paths and buildings and waterfront, the tiny existence of the Pink figure is left alone with the large cityscape which offers him very little than he would have imagined. The environment has taken over and the human form is hidden away. Here, we are allowed to draw our own conclusion as Sriwanichpoom encourages his audience to identify with the image. A mood enhanced by detailed camera angles, the viewer is given the impression that it could be himself/herself who are making this journey into the fear of the unknown and non-familiar, of being the 'other', in a alienate situation where everyone can be a victim or a target.

In the nature of his own society, Weng spins his photo-tales around a globalised environment that has rapidly been taking shape in China. Suspended somewhere in between authority, freedom, destiny and stereotype, the artist focuses on the new situation of Chinese society as China quickly became a capitalist country, or as termed by the Chinese government, "a capitalism with a socialist character".

The total reliance on the organisation of consumerism, flashed out within sight of centralised urban activities in shopping areas and business districts, has provided spectacles for the artist's incursion into the veins of China's new obsessions in pursuance of a 'modern lifestyle' climate within fast-forward times. Not even the far-ranging economic and social damage that occurred in the face of SARS epidemic early this year can stop the wheeling of seductive smears and marks in what the future Olympic country hands out and displays to its citizens and to the world.

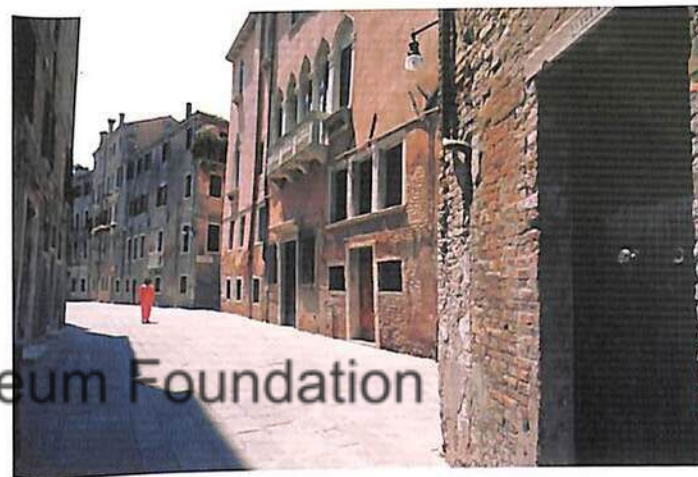
Weng's work involves performance, sometimes participatory, and documentation in video and photography since the mid 90s. Living and working in Hainan Island, his decision to remain in his hometown, unlike his peers who ventures into the big cities, is as much as political decision as an artistic one. It allows him to speak about issues which are local and specific, but which carry a discourse that also resonates across the whole country.

This is exemplified clearly in *Sitting on the wall*, a series produced over a period of two years in different suburban cities scattered in the south of China. Borrowing heavily from the field of "subjective photography", there are images of schoolgirls either sitting on walls or leaning over rooftops looking over at cityscapes dense with tens and hundreds of skyscrapers built almost seamlessly over a short pace of time. As if to capture the girl's longing, anxiety (or desire) about the future, the photographs brilliantly juxtaposed the petite-sized figure with the vast expansions of the phallic-looking building structures. An environment where, once these students pass the wall barriers, there is probably no turning back and subsequently, be trapped into the whirlwind of China's re-constructed nervous system of reality.

Appearing like photo stills in the format of landscape painting, these static shots interrupt the flow of real time and landscape itself is here used as a disillusioned cliché. Irritating though they may be, for the most part, clichés function only as tools of representation - an expedient use of a set of codified signs as, for example, in advertising or tourist brochures. However, they can be deadly attractive in a highly charged situation. And for Weng, the China of today is setting out like a steamed train to exploit the parody of speedy dreams in hedonistic consumer-led allurements.

The exhibition title, *From Desires to Where?*, is an implied narration that jams the two artists together. In either of the artist's desired questioning of the urban obsessions, is it permitted to exist and to come true for different reasons? The simple answer is Yes. Yet, in searching for one's desirability, the real nature of reality will always continue to have the upper hand from misrepresentations in the mass media of the propagandised image.

Josef Ng, Aug 2003.

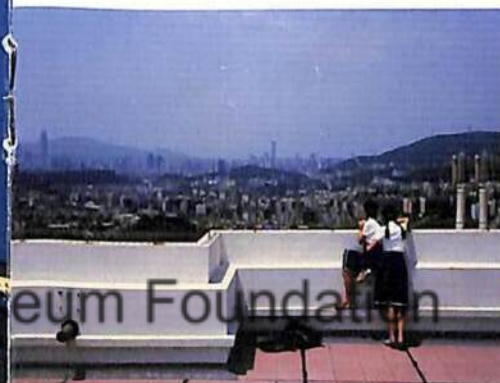


Pink Man in Venice 2
70 by 88 cm, 2003
Edition of 12

Pink Man on European Tour 2
40 by 60 cm, 2001
Edition of 10



Pink Man in Venice 1. 70 by 88 cm, 2003



Bird's Eye View - Shenzhen
Edition of 10, 2002

Sitting on the Wall - Haikou 2
Edition of 10, 2001

Bird's Eye View - Haikou
Edition of 10, 2002



Sitting on the Wall - Shenzhen 1, 2002

Weng Peijun (Weng Fen)

1961 Born in Hainan
1985 Graduated from Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts

EXHIBITIONS:

- 2003 Contemporary China, Pompidou Centre, Paris, France
1st Prague Biennale, Prague,
Facing nature Inner spaces, Poznan, Poland
How big is the world, Kaohsiung museum of fine art, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
Out Of The Red, Marella Arte Contemporanea, Milano, Italian
Too Much Flavor, Chambers Fine Art, New York, USA
Junction/Architectural Exhibition Of Chinese Contemporary,
Lianyyang architecture art museum, Shanghai, China
ARCO, Madrid, Spain
- 2002 1st Guangzhou Triennial, Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China
2nd Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China
Paris-BeiJing, Espace Cardin, Paris, France
Everyday Attitude - PingYao International photo Festival, PingYao, China.
New Photography from China, Courtyard Gallery, Beijing, China.
Chinese Modernity, Museu de Arte Brasileira-MAB, Sao Paulo, Brazil.
Too Much Flavor, 3H Art Center, Shanghai, China
How Big is the world, OK Contemporary Art Centre, Linz, Austria.
- 2001 1st Chengdu biennale, Chengdu contemporary art museum, Chengdu, China
Virtual Future, Guangdong Museum of Art, Gungzhou, China
L'album De La Famille China September de la Photo, Galerie Soardi, Nice, France
- 2000 China Avant-garde Artists Documents Exhibition, Fukuoka Museum Of Art, Japan
Normal and Abnormal, Yuangong Art Gallery, Shanghai, China
- 1999 Post -Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies & Delusion, Beijing, China

Manit Sriwanichpoom

BORN 27 September 1961

EDUCATION Visual Art [B.A.], Srinakharinvirot University, Bangkok

International group exhibition

- 2003 50th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
Next Move, La-Salle, SIA College of Fine Arts, Singapore
Thai-tanic, Ethen Cohen Fine Arts, New York, USA
- 2002 Asia Comment, Copenhagen, Denmark
Living out - Hiding In, Tang Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
Site and Sight, La-Salle SIA College of the arts, Singapore
- 2001 Borderline, Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand
China Pingyao International Photography Festival, Shanxi, China
4 de Bangkok, PhotoEspana, Madrid, Spain
Promise of Photography, DG Bank, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany
Polypolis, Kunsthau, Hamburg, Germany
- 2000 Glocal Scents of Thailand, Edsvik konst och kultur, Sollentuna, Sweden
Images of the World, Station, Copenhagen, Denmark
Tourist Industry, Forum Stadtpark, Graz, Austria
- 1999 Tachikawa International Art Festival, Tokyo, Japan
Cities on the Move, Secession, Vienna, Austria
Cities on the Move, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland
Cities on the Move, Hayward Gallery, London, UK
Cities on the Move, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark
International Photography Biennale, Mexico
1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Japan
- 1998 XXIV Bienal Internacional de Sao Paulo, Brazil
Souvenirs, London, UK
Contemporary Color Photography from Asia, Boston, USA
Asia City, The photographers' Gallery, London, UK

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2003 Repertoire of the Innermost, Plum Blossoms Gallery, Singapore

- 2002 In your Face, Numthong Gallery, Bangkok
Phantom and Parody, Atelier Frank & Lee, Singapore
Bangkok in Pink, the Gallery, Yokohama Museum of contemporary Art
- 2000 Bangkok in Black & White, Foreign Correspondent Club of Thailand, Bangkok
Paradise@the mall, Window, Bangkok
- 1997 Pink Man I, II, III, Soi Lalaisap, Silom road, Bangkok
This Bloodless War, Roadside Shows, Bangkok

Group exhibition [Thailand]

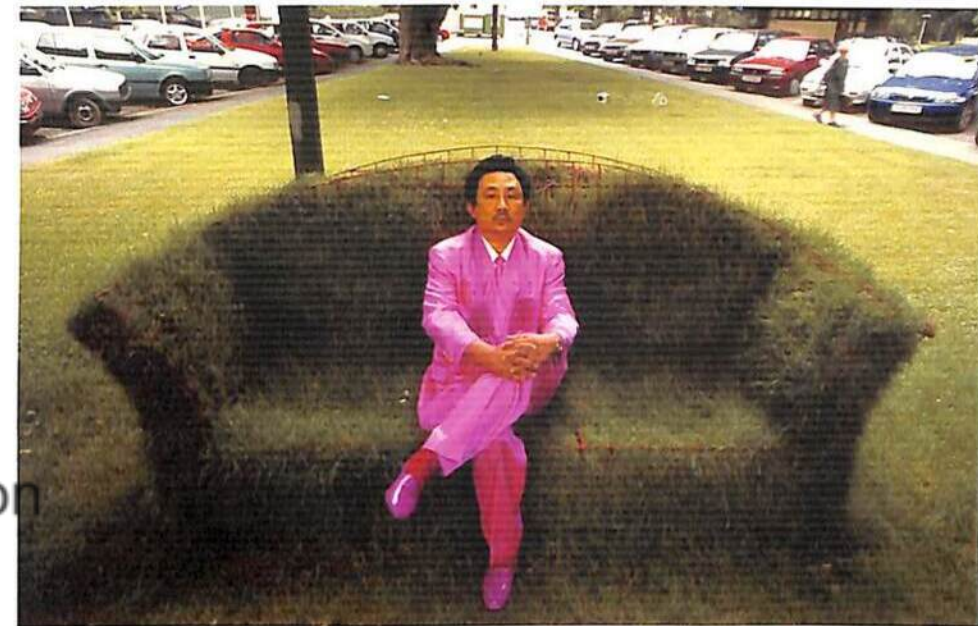
- 2001 History & Memory, Art center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
- 2000 Bangkok Inside/Outside, Goethe Institute, Bangkok
- 1998 The Pink, The Bad & The Ugly, Art Center, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
- 1998 World Artists for TIBET, Project 304, Bangkok

Awards

- 2002 One of the selected artists for the Book, BLINK. Published by Phaidon Press, Blink showcases 100 of the world's most exciting, rising star in contemporary photography, selected by 10 international curators.
- 1998 Second place Leopold Godowsky, Jr. Color photography Awards to Pink Man series and Thai Dreams series. Organized by The Photographic Resource Center, Boston University, USA.

Collections & commissions

Maison Europeenne de la Photographie (Paris), DG Bank (Germany), ABN-AMRO Bank (Netherlands), Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Singapore Art Museum, La-Salle School of Fine Arts (Singapore), Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok), and private collectors.



Manit Sriwanichpoom
Pink Man on European Tour 1
40 by 60 cm, 2001
Edition of 10

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