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CHEN WEI

WEB EXCLUSIVE BY KITTY VAN LEEUWEN
GALLERY EXIT

CHINA HONG KONG

If you manage to navigate your way through the winding streets of Aberdeen—a neighborhood on Hong Kong island's south side—you should be able to track down the well-hidden Gallery Exit, which, until last week, was showing one of the most rejuvenating photographic exhibitions of the season. Young Chinese artist Chen Wei's mesmerizing, staged photographs and intriguing installations provided an alluring introduction to a new generation of photographers from China.

The cinematic scenes compiled by Chen can easily be mistaken for extremely realistic oil paintings. This use of illusion, with its plays of light and shadow, is witnessed in *Entrance* (2013), which was inspired by a German underground dance club where the artist claims he once found a place of refuge. Only a small opening, from which light shines out, betrays the presence of the club, enticing the visitor to walk into the composition and find out what lies within.

Chen has an urge to learn everything there is to know and to keep abreast of any important events happening in the world. Artists, he feels, should be well versed in philosophy and literature in order to achieve success. The value of intellect is evidenced in Chen's inclusion of books in several works. *A Few Books On Art* (2013), for example, shows the impossibility of knowing everything. Piles upon piles of books, many of whose titles artists may recognize, are stacked in a grim-looking room. The ominous scene is perhaps an allusion to the fear some artists have that they may be in over their heads.

Chen stages his photographs with minimalistic precision. His installations take this a step further, transcending the limitations of two-dimensionality and drawing the viewer in. For example, with *Blank* (2011), a static television that sits on the floor, the artist represents a lost-in-translation experience he had while living in Japan. During an artist residency, Chen was unable to understand anything he watched on television. Flipping the channels incessantly, he recalls that, despite not being completely aware of what was being said, he was aware of what he was doing. In the installation, he challenges the viewer to share this disembodied experience.

Departing from the concerns of the previous generation of Chinese artists active after the Cultural Revolution, Chen isn't so much engaged with the country's politics as he is with the state of the world at large. A theatrical photographer who is not afraid to show his own insecurities, he is part of a new generation that is keen to share its own contemplations. Seduced by the artist's use of the language of cinema, it is easy for the viewer to become a part of Chen's world.

Chen Wei's solo exhibition was on view at Gallery Exit in Hong Kong from April 4–May 3, 2014.

Kitty van Leeuwen is a writer based in Hong Kong.



CHEN WEI, *Entrance*, 2013, archival inkjet print, 150 × 187.5 cm. Courtesy Gallery Exit, Hong Kong.



CHEN WEI, *Blank*, 2011, television, 30 × 40 × 40 cm. Courtesy Gallery Exit, Hong Kong.

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