

CHOW Chun Fai

Portraits from Behind

14 March – 16 May 2020

Opening: Saturday, 14 March 2020, 2 - 5 pm

EXIT, 3/F, 25 Hing Wo Street, Tin Wan, Aberdeen, Hong Kong

Hours: Tue - Sat, 11am - 6pm

Gallery EXIT is pleased to announce "Portraits from Behind", a solo exhibition of new works by CHOW Chun Fai. The exhibition will open on 14 March 2020 and remain on view through 16 May 2020. An opening reception will be held on Saturday, 14 March from 2pm to 5pm. For this exhibition, the Hong Kong-based artist has produced a series of mostly small-format paintings. Taken together, the works portray a city in crisis: they show scenes from the mass protests, violent clashes and indiscriminate arrests that shook the artist's hometown in 2019.

Like much of CHOW's previous work, his new paintings revolve around the question of Hong Kong's identity. For what is probably his best-known series, "Painting on Movies", the artist selected scenes from local and international films and painted them together with the corresponding subtitles. Many of the resulting pieces allude to the former British colony's struggle for belonging after the 1997 handover.

"Portraits from Behind" deals with the same quest for identity and self-determination, but it represents a very different approach from that of the earlier series. Like many other Hongkongers, CHOW was left deeply disturbed and shaken by the events of 2019. Unable to focus on his projects, he started to paint scenes from the protests as a way to process his emotions.

Compared to the carefully planned statements of "Painting on Movies", CHOW's new works are more spontaneous. Based on photos and other image sources such as live streams, they have an almost documentary quality to them. In the only large painting in the exhibition, a two-metre-wide panorama of the mass protests at Hong Kong's international airport in August 2019, the crowd is portrayed in a strictly factual way.

The remaining paintings are much smaller and can be divided into two distinctive groups. The slightly larger, upright formats show scenes that are more concrete and detailed. Looking at these paintings, we often find ourselves on the periphery of events. Taking on the role of observers, we look over the shoulders of frontline reporters, protesters and riot police. Violence and injustice almost always remain out of our sight, but the sense of danger is palpable.

The other group of works consists of square formats measuring just ten by ten centimetres. They are often more loosely painted, with some of them having an almost impressionistic quality to them. In many of these paintings, persons are either completely absent or only seen as silhouettes against a red backdrop. We glimpse shadows wading through clouds of gas, objects engulfed in flames and vague figures trying to shield themselves against projectiles. Despite their small size, these works powerfully evoke a tormented city on the brink of collapse.

CHOW's paintings of the protests offer neither context nor explanation. Instead of forcing an interpretation onto the viewer, they adopt a street-level perspective. We witness the clashes like ordinary Hongkongers would if they suddenly found themselves in a tense and rapidly escalating situation. Overwhelmed and with nothing but glimpses of the unfolding events, we must piece the fragments of information together by ourselves.

In their immediacy and directness, CHOW's paintings resemble the quick social media snapshots shared by citizen journalists during the protests. Committing those scenes to canvas, however, lends them a heightened sense of urgency. They make clear that something very important has changed, something that must never be allowed to slip into oblivion.

周俊輝《背影》

2020年3月14日至5月16日

開幕：3月14日(星期六)下午2時至5時

地點：安全口畫廊 香港香港仔田灣興和街25號 大生工業大廈3樓

辦公時間：星期二至六上午11時至下午6時

安全口畫廊呈獻香港藝術家周俊輝最新個人展覽《背影》，展覽於2020年3月14日至5月16日開放，開幕酒會在3月14日(星期六)下午2時至5時舉行。系列以小型油畫為主，共同描述一個城市所面對的險境：2019年的大型遊行、武力衝突和肆意拘捕，在他的城市接續發生。

就如他以往的作品，全新系列也觸及香港人的身分認同。其著名《電影繪畫系列》從本地和外國電影直接擷取場景和字幕，不少均指向這個前英國殖民地，在1997年政權移交後何去何從的掙扎。

《背影》同樣探尋身分與自決，但呈現角度則南轅北轍。他與大部分香港人一樣，深受2019年的一連串事件衝擊和震撼，心神耗盡，藉着繪畫示威情景排解情緒。

與《電影繪畫系列》比較，周俊輝的新作沒有前作的精確策劃，多了一份發自內心的即興。畫作以照片和直播截圖等媒介為基礎，幾乎擁有一種紀錄性。唯一一張大型油畫寬兩米，以寫實方式描繪2019年8月香港國際機場的大型示威人群。

其餘的小畫可分成兩組：尺寸稍大的垂直畫作仔細描繪場景，觀眾彷彿置身事件的周邊，以旁觀者角度從後觀看前線記者、抗爭者和警察的舉動。暴力與不公義似乎都發生在畫框以外，但當中的危險與不安卻可切身感受。

另一組小畫呈正方形，尺寸僅十乘十厘米。寬鬆的筆觸為畫面賦予近乎印象派的色彩。不少作品裏都沒有人的存在，只有一些輪廓隱現在火紅背景前，我們瞥見人影在煙霧裏艱辛行進，物件被火燄吞噬，模糊的身影嘗試抵擋擊彈來襲。小小的畫面盛載灼熱的力量，呈現一個瀕臨崩潰邊緣的城市。

周俊輝的示威畫作抽離情境也不予解釋，讓觀眾從街頭角度自行觀察。我們就如置身緊張局勢的香港市民，目擊街上的衝突和急轉直下的發展，眼前的狀況不斷變化，只能把一點點的資訊拼湊起來。

那種直接性和溫度，恍如民間記者在社交媒體上分享的快拍照片，而將這些情景轉移到畫布上，更提升了畫中狀況的迫切性。重大的改變已經發生，記憶豈能遺忘。