

A Year in the Life of a City: Recent Photographs by David Clarke

Photographs, by virtue of their perceived trueness-to-life, possess authenticity, an unassailable authority of knowledge about that which is photographed. They also make still movement, a point in time, a fragment of a narrative. This exhibition of photographs of Hong Kong by the art historian David Clarke is a personal portrait of the city in which he has lived for the past twenty years, drawn from his most recent photographic project, published as *Hong Kong x 24 x 365: A Year in the Life of a City* by the Hong Kong University Press.

Framed as a fictitious and sometimes rambling journey through the city, Clarke's work often possesses an anthropological tension implicit in the resolution of the photographer's role as participant/ observer: at times distant, interested more in mood, colour, composition, and the poetry of an image. Yet it can also be achingly intimate, made more so in juxtaposition. There is very little middle-ground. Taken over a random twelve-month period between October 2004 and October 2005, the photographs map a route from the Peak down to North Point, taking in Central and Sheung Wan, and across the harbour into the New Territories. This is a Hong Kong that is recognisable in its landmarks and geography, but also one made anonymous in its interiors and nightlife. The images capture the urban landscape as it is experienced - at street level, fleetingly, and up close - but also reveals the city in new guises at unusual or oblique angles. Clarke is presenting the city to those who don't know it, in images that show the city's current (in some cases fallen) icons, but also bringing new knowledge of the city to those that do.

Throughout his photographic work Clarke has used black and white film and, as a mature photographer, a 40mm Leica Minilux camera. For the first time, in this latest project, Clarke has turned to the digital camera (from the Panasonic Lumix range which represents continuity with his earlier work through the use of Leica lenses), and colour photography. These new images, therefore, also represent freedom from the constraints of film photography, from not knowing whether a photograph taken is as imagined; and freedom from the wave-like emotion of regret. Digital photography allows you to try out different aesthetic options without commitment.

In an earlier installation entitled *1968/ 2002*, the Museum presented Clarke's

first experiments with film paired with photographs taken of the same location thirty-four years later. Here Clarke's preoccupation with marking the passage of time was simply but poignantly made in presence versus absence. This interest in re-visiting specific events or periods of time continues in a separate installation in the current exhibition in which Clarke has re-fashioned earlier work as well as showing most recent ones. In his Reclaimed Land project Clarke took a picture every day over the five-year period straddling the passage of sovereignty over Hong Kong from Britain to China.* On view is a digitised version of a year's worth of those images, originally taken using film immediately before and after the handover, played ten times over at breakneck speed. Although Ten Handovers was devised in 2004, that this year marks the tenth anniversary of that moment in 1997 makes for a timely consideration of this work.

Another dimension of Clarke's interest in the way that time frames how we experience life is powerfully made in an experimental film installation entitled Slow Progress in which the artist meditates upon the futility of living an existence that is object-based. The viewer is taken on a journey in which there is no beginning or end. The simplicity of this work makes the sense of thwarted expectation all the more palpable and frustrating.

A smaller installation of photographs taken in the past few months catapults the main installation to the near present. Elaborating many of the visual themes that already exist in the 2004 to 2005 photographs, some document further the relentless march of progress and the passing of time.

As an art historian, Clarke is someone whose relationship to images is framed by words, how fitting then that images should take their place when framing the lived experience. Clarke's preference for unexpected, more painterly images over straightforward views of Hong Kong is the artist's attempt to draw attention away from the apparent veracity or descriptiveness of the scenes depicted. Clarke's photographs capture fleeting moments, feelings and experiences that contribute to the texture of Hong Kong, and which as he turns his camera away, disappear completely.

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* David Clarke, *Reclaimed Land: Hong Kong in Transition* (Hong Kong University Press, 2002).

攝影是據實取景的，真確可信。一張照片，可以凝住活動，停在一刻，說出故事的片段。祈大衛是藝術史學者，在香港居住了二十年，這次展出他對這久居城市的印象記錄，主要來自他的最新攝影集，由香港大學出版社編印的“Hong Kong x 24 x 365: A Year in the Life of a City”。

祈大衛的照片以一段漫遊城市的旅程為主題，他冷靜觀察，專注於氣氛、顏色、構圖、詩意等客觀元素；但在專業以外，亦有感性的個人體驗。旁觀者與局內人兩種對立的視角，一直貫穿於他的作品中。這段 2004 年 10 月至 2005 年 10 月的旅程，路線自太平山頂開始，經北角、中環、上環，到新界地方，展現香港著名的建築地標、自然環境，以及不知名的室內裝潢、夜生活。這些照片表現香港的日常見聞，很多已是過眼雲煙，卻又感到親切；由於他取景角度特別，城市彷彿有了新面貌。透過照片中 (或現已消失) 的城市景觀，不認識香港的人士會增進對香港的瞭解；至於熟悉者，則更添上新知。

一直以來，祈大衛使用平實的“萊卡 Minilux 40mm”照相機和黑白膠卷來創作。這展覽首次介紹他的數碼作品。他改用“樂聲 Lumix”照相機，拍攝彩照，但仍用萊卡鏡頭。他不再受膠卷限制，即時便知道所拍影像是否理想，亦減少了錯失良機的遺憾。數碼技術使攝影變得靈活，容易按下快門，無須擔心後果。

博物館過去曾展出祈大衛最早的膠卷照片，命名“1968/2002”，那是相隔三十四年的兩輯照片。雖然在同一地點拍攝，景物依舊，但人面全非，歲月的痕跡表露無遺。祈大衛很喜歡回顧往時與舊事。展覽第二部分，是他較早期創作的重新演譯，以及最新的照片作品。他的“過渡期的香港”系列，是他每天連續拍照的記錄，見證香港主權回歸中國前後五年的歷史。*在這次展品中，他將主權交接前後一年間的照片重新製成數碼影像，高速播放連續十次。這作品於 2004 年製作，命名“十次移交”，不失為九七回歸十周年紀念的珍貴回憶。

此外，展場播放的實驗性短片“慢行”，表現由時間主宰生活的模式。他在巴士上取景，彷彿是拍下逼不得已的重覆片段，觀眾如同跟上沒有開始或結束的路線。這種簡單的表現形式，卻耐人尋味。

他在數月前創作的照片也一併展出，一些是 2004 至 2005 年時拍下的影像的延續發展，再次顯示景物的時間旅程。

祈大衛是藝術史學者，擅用文字描述影像，利用影像概括生活體驗。他不取直述的紀實手法，而以特殊角度取景，捕捉香港的如畫印像。城市景觀就是日新月異，

祈大衛的鏡頭正好凝固香港瞬息萬變的光影，並記載不同人物的情懷和際遇。畢竟在攝影之後，城市事物每多消逝，只有影像才留存下來。

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* David Clarke, *Reclaimed Land: Hong Kong in Transition* (Hong Kong University Press, 2002).

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