

ISOLATION INTERVIEWS

GORDON CHEUNG





ISSUE 7

Continuing the Isolation Interviews: a new series of weekly artist profiles highlighting current concerns, accompanied by a selection of available works.

We know that these are precarious and uncertain times for everyone and with so many people staying at home, self-isolating or social distancing, we want to be able to continue sharing some of our favourite art and artists with you. The Isolation Interviews are a weekly series of conversations with artists that will explore how these new circumstances are affecting their practices and productivity. We'll hear how they are finding solutions - and even opportunities - and what their plans and hopes are for the future.

Brooke Benington is committed to supporting and creating opportunities for artists. We believe that this is needed now more than ever. Most artists are self-employed, often supplementing their income by working as technicians, fabricators, assistants, teachers and a whole host of other jobs. Now, many have very suddenly lost a vital source of income. With this in mind, we are accompanying each Isolation Interview with a curated selection of work by that artist, available for purchase.

Thank you for your continued support. Stay safe and look after one another.

Lily & George
Directors, Brooke Benington



We are now well into this lockdown period, have you managed to find a new working rhythm? How have you been forced to change or adapt your practice, if at all?

My team adapted quickly and refocused our creative energy on remote projects. For example, we built an online shop (gordoncheung.com) to help raise money for COVID19 related causes including Trussell Trust, the NHS and #ArtistSupportPledge. Personally, as an artist, isolation is a default state of being. Since we are in lockdown, I, like many others, have been working from home and able to concentrate on projects I've delayed for years. I have been researching and developing new techniques and mediums such as 3D printing and Chinese porcelain, and thinking of ways to incorporate them into my new body of work. At the same time there have been other projects that have come to fruition,

such as the recent online launch of the 'Ancient Mariner Big Read', where I made a work of art for part of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem read by Willem Defoe.

Your work makes reference to social, political and economic concerns, alongside cultural mythologies. Your most recent solo exhibition "Tears of Paradise" at Edel Assanti was conceived and born into a world that now feels somewhat removed from the one we are living in today. Has the way you feel about that body of work changed at all from your current perspective?

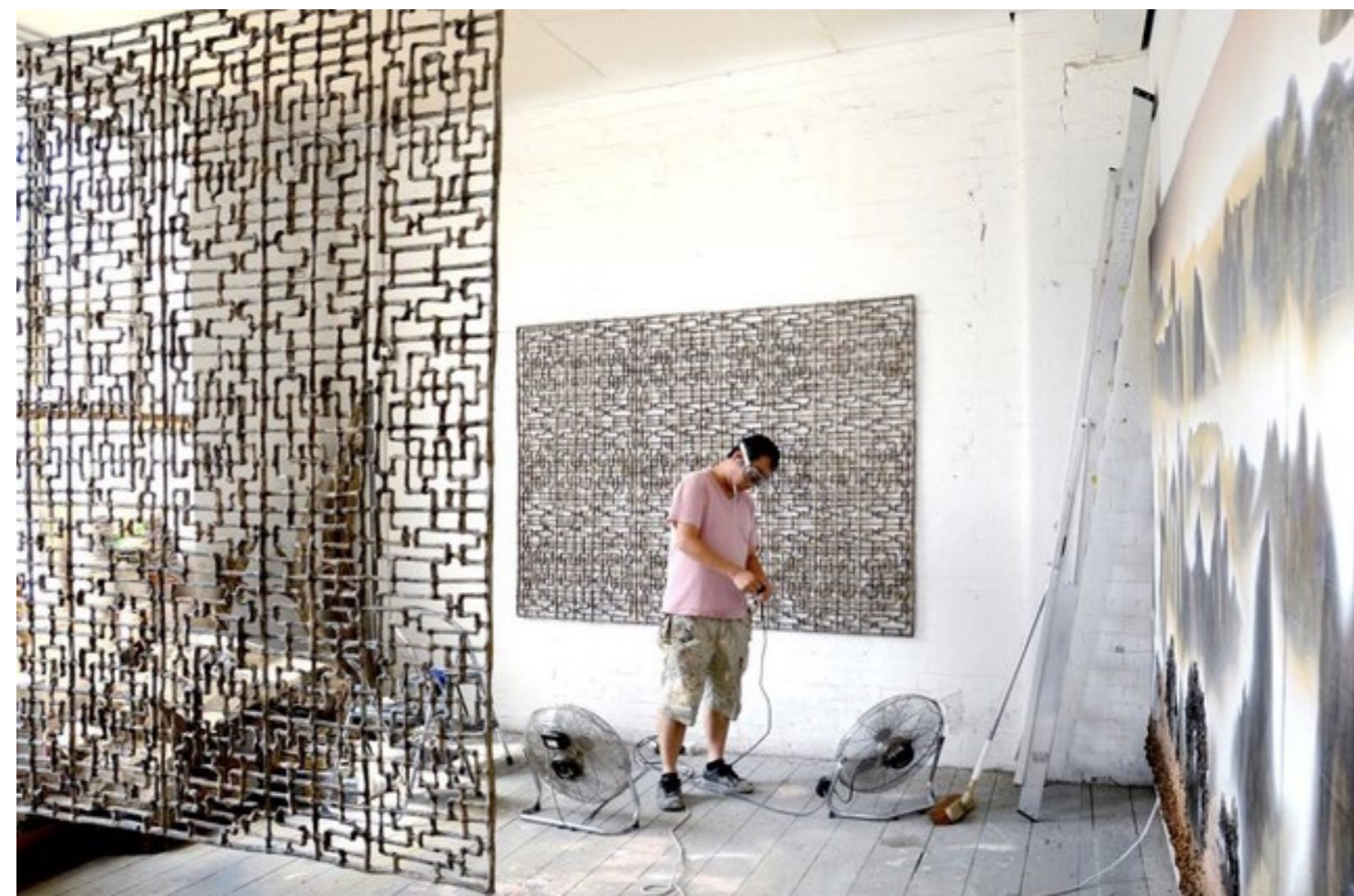
The themes of "Tears of Paradise" span over 170 years. Starting around 1842, the British Empire essentially became the first narco state in history by sending gunboats to help the East India Trade Company force China to consume Opium, resulting in the Opium Wars, Century of

Humiliation, Unfair Treaties and Hong Kong becoming a British colony.

I believe the global pandemic and the rise of anti-Chinese racism has made this body of work more relevant than I intended. 'Tears of Paradise' is also about the unprecedented scale of Modern China's developments in respect to infrastructure, where more railway, roads and cities were built than the entire world history within a matter of decades. The recent US instigated Trade War with China has heightened the fear of China's rising power in the West and this has inspired me to create new work and look into Wuhan. I've learnt that Wuhan is not only the alleged epicenter of the virus outbreak but also China's main interconnected economic hub, where they are transitioning from a manufacturing to a high-tech economy, making it a convenient target for politicising COVID19 from pre-existing political and cultural conflicts.

Alongside your (presumably) very labour intensive painted practice, you have for several years been producing digital glitch works using an open source algorithm to manipulate appropriated images. Does this way of working allow you to produce work more quickly and potentially be more reactive to current events?

When I first started using the algorithm it took weeks to make the image that I wanted, and if it was for an animation it could take months. It's a sorting algorithm that doesn't erase or copy over pixels but rather reorganises them in accordance with dark or light values, creating what I call a "digital sands of time" effect. For me it is a metaphor for a new order, the repetition of history and a blurring technique to reconsider fixed points of histories written by victors. After a couple of years of investing in powerful computers to crunch through the algorithm calculations, a friend helped me design a user friendly interface resulting





in my ability to react quickly to current events with a series I call 'History Glitch'.

Your recent solo exhibition featured a sculptural installation for the first time that I can recall. This installation "Home, 2020" featured designs for traditional Chinese domestic windows. Could you tell us where this idea came from and also how it relates to your painted practice both thematically and in terms of their fabrication/construction?

I am a British Born Chinese and my parents emigrated from Hong Kong to

the UK. My identity exists in-between cultures, and having lived through the 1997 handover of Hong Kong back to China, the existential questions of what constitutes a home became profoundly important for me. 'Home' was first shown in 2018 at my solo exhibition in Hong Kong. With the 2020 exhibition at Edel Assanti, I knew I wanted to make an ambitious installation that cascades up the large skylight area of the gallery; a suspended matrix of bamboo and newspaper "window" sculptures metaphorically symbolising a ghost architecture, phasing in and out, demarcating with its rapid urbanisation China's transition from Communism to Capitalist Communism.

This "windows" series was conceived around 15 years ago after I found a book full of traditional Chinese window designs in a Chinatown thrift shop. I was fascinated with the images but had no idea how to use them in my art until around three years ago, following a journey on the Silk Road, beginning in China and travelling through to Uzbekistan, whilst reading about China's economic miracles.



Over the years my paintings have taken on a sculptural quality. I layer different materials and ideas both conceptually and physically. It wasn't a difficult transition to move into the sculptures because I used a familiar creative process. The layering of financial newspaper, using adhesive before moulding them over bamboo forms, symbolises time, giving a sense of humanity that resonates with the themes of rapid urbanisation and the human cost involved with achieving an economic miracle. Once dried, they are sanded back to create a driftwood-like effect representing traditional values being weathered by the global forces of Capitalism.

As an artist who has always had a global perspective within his work, do you have a sense for how the world might be changed

as a result of this period of enforced stasis and reflection?

The strange times of this current history have revealed the qualities of our leaders to us through their handling of the crisis, and what could be a looming economic depression. I doubt that we will return to 'normality' anytime soon.

I hope we will be able to reflect and act on how we might improve and value the vital importance of our healthcare and economy for the benefit of the majority of people. Otherwise we are doomed to repeat history, but as we have seen from those on the frontline of saving our lives, it takes enormous resilience to overcome a global pandemic. The human spirit in the face of adversity is incredible to witness.

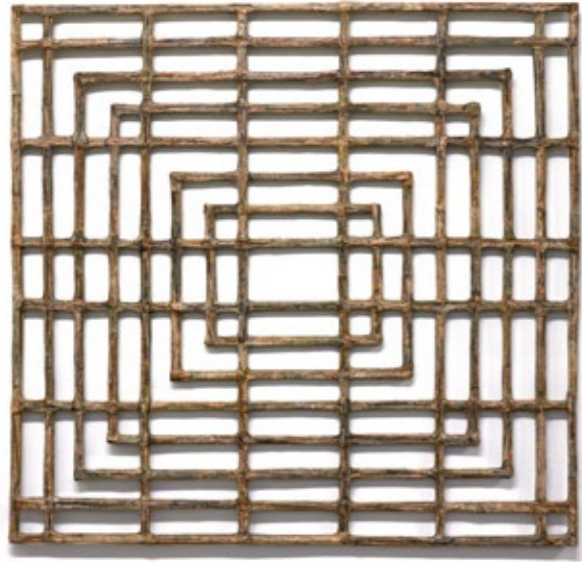




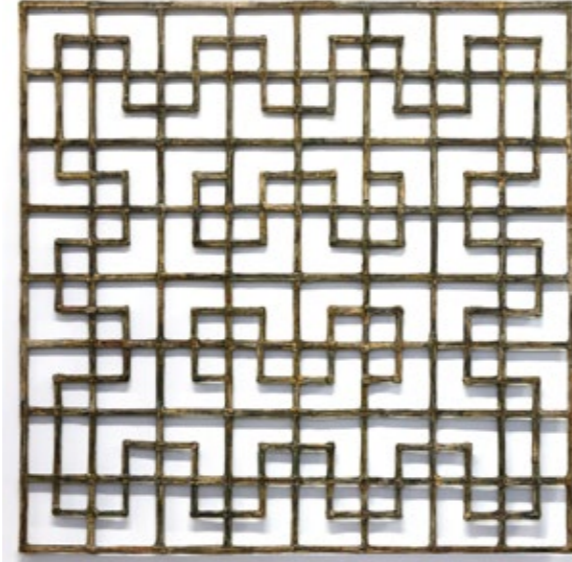
GORDON CHEUNG

Gordon Cheung is interested in historical revisionism and the underlying mechanics of power that govern our understanding of the world. Imagery itself is Cheung's primary medium, co-opted in the creation of multifaceted paintings or manipulated via digital algorithms, ultimately posing a challenge to dominant political narratives and visual culture's active participation in them. Mapping epic post-apocalyptic landscapes against the backdrop of Financial Times stock listings, Cheung's work draws as much on classical literary and art historical sources as it does on contemporary media and imagery.

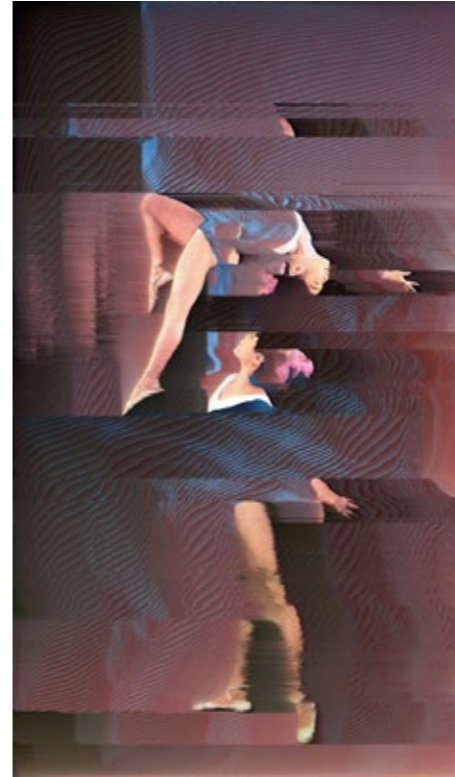
Cheung graduated from Central Saint Martins in 1998, completing an MA at the Royal College of Art in 2001. Cheung lives and works in London. Solo exhibitions include *Tears of Paradise* at Edel Assanti, London, 2020; *Home* at Galerie Huit, Hong Kong, 2018; *New Order Vanitas* at Ann Norton Sculpture Gardens, USA, 2017; *Gordon Cheung* at The Whitaker, UK, 2017; *Here be Dragons* at Nottingham Castle Museum, 2016; *Lines in the Sand* at Leila Heller Gallery Dubai, 2016; *Altered States* at the Arizona State University Art Museum, 2010; *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* at the New Art Gallery Walsall, 2009; *The Promised Land* at Jack Shainman Gallery, 2009. Cheung's work features in numerous public collections worldwide, including Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The British Museum, The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Hood Museum of Art, Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, San Antonio Museum of Art, Speed Art Museum, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Arizona State University Art Museum and The Yale Center for British Art.



Window #23, 2020
Financial Times stock listings, bamboo and adhesive
110 x 120 cm
43 1/4 x 47 1/4 in.



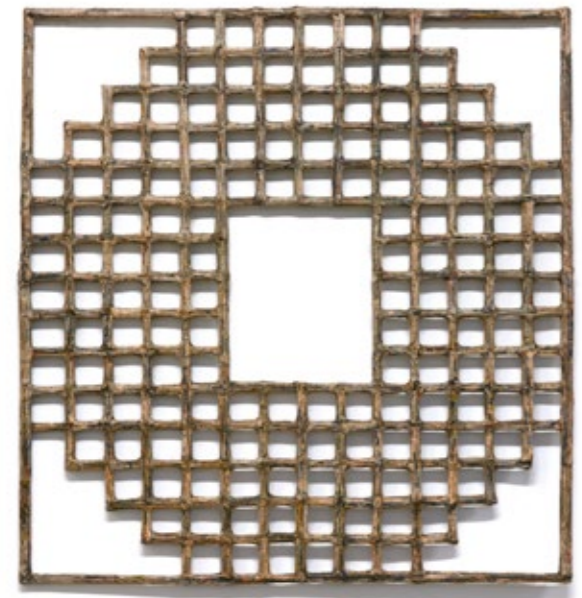
Window, 2020
Financial Times newspaper, bamboo
120 x 120 cm
47 1/4 x 47 1/4 in.



Balancing Gymnastics Blue, 2018
Glicée on canvas
68 x 40 cm
26.8 x 15.7 in



Forbidden City (study), 2016
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, pumice, ink and acrylic on canvas
80 x 100 cm
31 1/2 x 39 3/8 in.



Window, 2020
Financial Times newspaper, bamboo
120 x 120 cm
47 1/4 x 47 1/4 in.



Lots of Love for Chairman Mao, (after Xie Zhiguang, 1955), 2016
Giclée on canvas
77.5 x 54 cm
30 1/2 x 21 1/4 in.



Towers of Water, 2020
Financial Times stock listings, archival inkjet, sand and acrylic on canvas
80 x 100 cm
59 1/8 x 78 3/4 in.

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