

VICE, *Chen Wei's Images Reveal the Mysteries of Chinese Club Culture*, text/ NADJA SAYEJ, March 28, 2017



## Creators

PHOTOGRAPHY

# Chen Wei's Images Reveal the Mysteries of Chinese Club Culture

 NADJA SAYEJ  
Mar 28 2017, 12:01pm



The photographer stages eerie scenes inspired by China's subversive nightlife.

Chinese nightlife is vastly different to Western clubbing culture—and it's not all karaoke like you're thinking. Nightclubs in Shanghai and Beijing are filled with young people dressed to the nines, sitting around at tables that are rented by the hour, drinking Chinese liquor. Few dance at these 'entertainment halls', which often blare pop hits in English. To celebrate a unique culture that may appear strange to Western eyes, Chinese artist [Chen Wei](#) has opened a new exhibition at the [Centre for Contemporary Photography](#) in Melbourne called 'The Club.' The solo show, his first in Australia, is inspired by Chinese nightlife and the mystery that surrounds it.

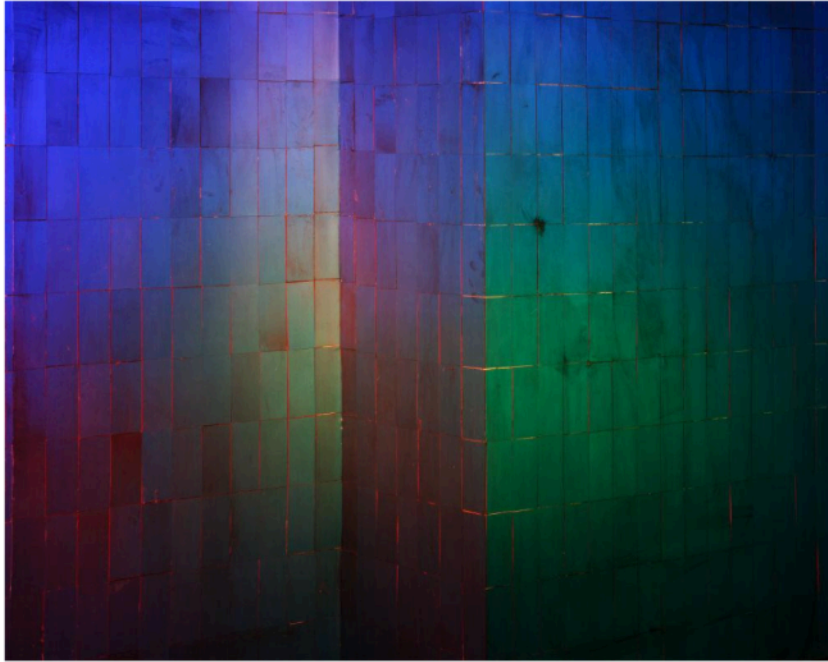
According to Wei, clubs appeared across China in the 1980s, during a time where it was hard for large numbers of people to gather in public spaces. 'Clubs allowed this to happen,' he says. 'Young artists and intellectuals began to gather at nightclubs, both to discuss the newest ideas and to dance.'

ADVERTISEMENT



[https://creators.vice.com/en\\_au/article/chen-weis-images-reveal-the-mysteries-of-chinese-club-culture](https://creators.vice.com/en_au/article/chen-weis-images-reveal-the-mysteries-of-chinese-club-culture)

## LEO XU PROJECTS



Later in the 1990s, as the country opened itself up to the rest of the world, dance clubs became more commercial and less subversive. In other words, to go to a nightclub was no longer a rebellious act. "It was more of a party place for businessmen," Wei explains. The country now has a thriving nightclub scene, whether it's the larger clubs in big cities, or even smaller spaces in remote villages.

"While young people are always the main driving force for club culture, nowadays nobody talks about politics anymore, just money," he says. "For me, it reflects how China is at a crossroads, having caught up with western culture and unsure what is coming next."



Wei's photographs aren't all they seem. While they look as if they were actually taken in nightclubs, the images were captured in his studio, and a film studio. This allowed him to stage scenes he had imagined in his mind. "I constructed sets that were based on detailed interviews with friends and colleagues. They would describe the space, the environment, the lighting, and other details from clubs they have visited." The artist combined fragments of their stories with imaginary details he found online and his own experience.

## LEO XU PROJECTS



For Wei, the series provides an important opportunity to shine light on the dark rooms where young Chinese people come of age.

"For decades, club scenes in the West have been photographed and written about in youth and fashion magazines, but that didn't happen in China," he says.



The exhibition continues at CCP Melbourne until May 7. Find out more [here](#).