

Meniscus, *Chen Wei: Chinese nightlife in photos-Art Basel Hong Kong 2013*, text/ Yuan-Kwan Chan, May 23, 2013

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Chen Wei: Chinese nightlife in photos – Art Basel Hong Kong 2013

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"What drew you to these works?"

That was the question posed by an associate of the Leo Xu Projects, the Shanghai-based contemporary art gallery that focuses on the work of young Chinese artists.

My initial response was that I wondered where the nightclub depicted in "Entrance," Chen Wei's 2013 work that shows a lonely box-shaped opening with bright peach light streaming out, was located. Barely discernible above the door were the faint shadows of some Chinese lettering that had been removed; a bit more readable on the standalone sign outside, the word "Disco."

My answer now is that Chen's new series of photographs, showcased at Art Basel Hong Kong 2013, is

simultaneously familiar and haunting. At first glance, it is a commentary on what happens when the brakes are applied to a youthful generation searching for escape outlets. "In the Waves #1" shows young Chinese, bathed in a bright orange light, in a hypnotic trance on the dance floor, not interacting with each other, whereas "Balls" shows a couple of bright silver disco balls fallen on that same floor after the party is over.

In fact, Chen was a step ahead of us: he fooled us. He staged all the scenes. The nightclub that was a nightclub never actually existed and the dancers were not there to dance in the first place. His series resembling glossy film stills now raises a host of questions, mostly focusing on what is actually real versus imagined, particularly since nightlife was, until now, a subject not previously explored in Chen's preferred genre of post-1989 mainland Chinese photography. The series is the latest in the artist's three years of research into youth culture in his home country, but at the same time these scenes very well could have been captured anywhere in the world. Those not in the know may be compelled to act on the same immediate reaction I had, in search for the remnants of an entertainment venue that never was.



Chen Wei: Dance Hall (Blueness) at Art Basel Hong Kong 2013. (photo by Yuan-Kwan Chan / Meniscus Magazine)

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