

Artforum, *Critics' Pick*, July 2012

ARTFORUM

Chen Wei

LEO XU PROJECTS

Lane 49, Building 3, Fuxing Xi Road | 复兴西路 49 弄 3 号, Xuhui District | 徐汇区
June 3–July 15

Everything is meticulously staged in Chen Wei's photographs. A standout work in his debut exhibition in Shanghai focuses on a handmade Ping-Pong table: a makeshift slab of wood with a layer of yellow paint on it, with a cutout of More brand cigarette cartons strapped on as a dividing net. On one end resides a single cardboard paddle, its handle formed hastily out of layers of tape. The floor is littered with disused, dented balls: the disjecta of games past. The sun casts a late-afternoon window frame shadow across the desolate interior. Day is done, no more fun.



Chen Wei, *Ping Pong*, 2011, C-print, 59 x 79".

In another image, tomatoes seem to have been splattered all over a room. In the midst of the scene, there's a red foldout chair with a white undershirt draped on the back support. Again, the room is nearly dark, illuminated only by a narrow strait of sunlight. It's like we're sneaking a read of some forbidden novel, or peeking at the remnants of a ritual that was supposed to remain private, hidden.

Throughout this show, Chen extracts a melancholic underlining out of every possible situation, which is why his photographs are so often devoid of figures—when a person does appear, it is usually the artist himself, his face hidden—yet full of human traces. But Chen is not involved in some realist project. He is wise enough to follow his own impulses, which occasionally bring him over the edge, as in the Polaroid series "Everlasting Radio Wave," 2008, where the birds fly right through the head of an intrepid domestic explorer. That Chen makes these image-events happen without imploring us to consider them as factual narratives makes us believe all the more that they could be true.

— Travis Jeppesen

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