

《Ten Magazine》, CHEN WEI, Winter Spring 12



CHEN WEI

HIS PHOTOS CAPTURE
DARK, **SELF-ENCLOSED**
WORLDS THAT HE
CREATES IN HIS STUDIO.

Honey in the Broadcast from 2008 is particularly intense. The bare, mint green and white walls, ceiling fan and concrete floor suggests the waiting room of a rundown institution – perhaps a hospital or a prison. There's an implicit violence in the rumpled, blood-red sheet that snakes around one wall. A lonely figure sits on a bench, his head bowed in intense concentration on a black spot blossoming on his chest. The same black patches are spreading around the ventilation shaft and the corners of the room: swarming bees. It's a scene of quietly throbbing, surreal horror, worthy of David Lynch.

The accolades have been coming thick and fast for Chen Wei of late. The Beijing-based 31-year-old just won the First Asia Pacific Photography Award and his work has been compared to the master of elaborately produced photographic nightmares, Gregory Crewdson. Chen's photography, though, is considerably more personal and private, mixing childhood memories with art history and his experiences in contemporary China. The marvels of early inventors and 19th-century sideshows also make offbeat appearances. I'm Always Chasing Rainbows has a man, his back to us, encased in an antique box pierced by gleaming blades.

Chen has a fondness for certain motifs, like the bees, which are shown crawling over a pale men's suit in A Grey Suit, and wax, encrusting an old-fashioned faded black hat or dripping from a candle over the hand that bears it. References to Western artists swim around. Honey and wax happen to be materials favoured by the German artist Joseph Beuys, too, who famously favoured a dark hat. Robert Gober has a thing for candles.

However, it would be wrong to reduce Chen's work to a game of spot-the-art-reference. Whether it's the cactus studded with thorns of broken glass in Send Forth Many Cullets, or the flurry of bats that shoot out of a radio box in Everlasting Radio Wave, his photos manage to pack both an immediate visceral hit and a lasting mystery.

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