

Huang Po-Chih Blue Elephant

November 27, 2021 to May 8, 2022



Huang Po-Chih
*Blue Elephant—
Master Cheung & Aunt Hang, 2019*
Photography
160 x 140 cm
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Taiwanese artist Huang Po-Chih has contributed participatory projects geared toward social exchange to the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2014), the Taipei Biennial (2014 and 2016), Performa 19 in New York City (2019), and, most recently, the Busan Biennale (2020). Starting November 2021, mumok will present his first solo exhibition outside Asia.

Huang Po-Chih (* 1980 in Taoyuan) belongs to a generation of artists socialized in a time of democratic reform and rapid economic growth in Taiwan. After abolishing one-party rule and martial law in 1987, Taiwan transformed itself into a neoliberal capitalist, democratically organized society. The political status of Taiwan remains contested, a consequence of the Chinese Civil War in which troops of the national Chinese Kuomintang under Chiang Kai-Shek retreated to Taiwan after their defeat and founded the Republic of China there. In the struggle with the USA for dominance in the Pacific Ocean region, the People's Republic of China, with its aspirations of superpower status, is again making threatening gestures toward the island state of Taiwan, which has been ruled democratically since the dissolution of martial law in 1987. The People's Republic strives for reunification under the principle of "one country, two systems," which the Taiwanese perspective would see as annexation.

Huang's multidisciplinary practice, which encompasses various artistic media as well as literature, agribusiness, textile manufacturing, and social entrepreneurship, reflects Taiwan's changing identity discourse over the past decades: from an inward-looking narrative governed by Japanese occupation, the role in the Cold War, and claims of sovereignty from the People's Republic of China to a transnational vision that takes local, East Asian, and global perspectives into account. Huang revisits and analyzes the basic mechanisms of global capitalism, of production, trade, exchange, and consumption, which manifest in an intricate array of interconnections bridging the micro- and macrolevels—while the institutional framework of art serves as a platform of social exchange.

Huang's presentation at mumok is centered around the multi-part work series *Production Line – Made in China & Made in Taiwan* (2014–21). Based on his essay *Blue Skin: Mama's Story* (2011–13), in which he recounts his mother's eventful working life, Huang's series addresses the rise and fall of Taiwanese textile production and its incremental outsourcing to Shenzhen, China. Huang's mother and other former, now unemployed textile workers participated in this project as hands for a makeshift denim-shirt production line that leads from Shenzhen back to Taipei. Huang used the platforms of the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2014) and the Taipei Biennial (2014), where the shirts were produced and sold in several production steps, to investigate how "art (in the form of commodities or events) can initiate new meanings and definitions within complex social relationships".

Blue Elephant, the exhibition title, is an allusion to the working reality of the Taiwanese textile industry, interweaving personal experience—the permanent physical strain that years of working as a seamstress put on Huang Po-Chih's

mother—with larger social and political contexts: The Taiwanese government used the elephant metaphor as propaganda to boost workers' moral.

In his latest video work, *Seven People Crossing the Sea* (2019–21), Huang negotiates the global socioeconomic transformations in East Asia within the experience of various protagonists. This work interweaves real and fictional elements around the life story of Ho Ying, an illegal Chinese immigrant who on his quest for the “Hong Kong Dream” became a vendor in Hong Kong's Pang Jai textile market. An important social hub for locals, the market is currently at risk of falling victim to the Hong Kong city government's urban development plans. As one of the last remaining market-stall owners, Ho Ying initiated a comprehensive anti-relocation movement that has raised questions about the legitimacy of vendors and the investigation of the grassroots living space.

Curated by Heike Eipeldauer

Exhibition Catalogue: Huang Po-Chih. Blue Elephant

Edited by: Heike Eipeldauer, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2021

Foreword by: Karola Kraus, Heike Eipeldauer

Texts by: Heike Eipeldauer, Huang Po-Chih, Amy Cheng

Dimensions: 14,5 x 21,5 cm

Volume: 160 Seiten

Images: Color images

Language: English

ISBN: 978-3-902947-93-2 (mumok), 9 78-3-7533-0152-5 (Walther und Franz König)

Publisher: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln

Costs: € 14,90 (Shipping: Austria € 5,00, within the EU € 16,00, worldwide on request)

Biography

Huang Po-Chih (* 1980 in Taoyuan, lives and works in Hsinchu, Taiwan) completed his studies at the Taipei National University of the Arts in Taiwan in 2011. Solo exhibitions (selec: *500 Lemon Trees: An Organic Archive*, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan (2016). Group exhibitions (selection): 8th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale at OCT Contemporary Art Terminal (OCAT), Shenzhen, China (2014); Taipei Biennial, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan (2014 and 2016), Performa 19, Performa Hub, New York, USA (2019); Busan Biennale, Busan, South Korea (2020). Awards: 8th Taishin Arts Award (2009) Grand Prize of the Taipei Arts Awards (2013), Hugo Boss Asia Art Award (2015), Prudential Eye Award (2016).

The exhibition as well as the catalogue are supported by the Ministry of Culture, Taiwan.

We wish to thank our media partners Der Standard, Falter, Wien live, and Ö1.