

MICHAEL WOLF

INFORMAL ARRANGEMENTS

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Private View: Thursday 26 November 6-8 pm

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"Hong Kong's back alleys are often unnoticed against their more glamorous counterparts of dazzling architecture. However, they present an authentic slice of Hong Kong's grass roots culture. In my opinion they should be nominated as a heritage site." – Michael Wolf

For over twenty years Michael Wolf has captured the hyper-density of the city of Hong Kong through his large-scale photographs of its high rise architecture. In a new solo exhibition *Informal Arrangements* at Flowers Gallery, Wolf juxtaposes an abstracted view of Hong Kong's seemingly endless industrial facades with an intimate perspective from within its hidden network of back alleys, in a series of photographic typologies and vernacular sculptures.

Since his arrival in the city in 1994, Wolf has been absorbed in an alternative urban culture, condensed and preserved within Hong Kong's laneways. Situated between public and private space, the alleys are utilized by the population in a myriad of ways; forming shortcuts between the main thoroughfares, they also provide quiet resting places, or are claimed as much-needed storage spaces by local workers and residents.

Within the cramped confines of the alleys, the flotsam of the city is accumulated and re-purposed. All available space and material is exploited, as discarded items take on new improvised functions. Walls are lined with clusters of gloves hung to dry from wire clothes hangers; pipes are festooned with vividly coloured plastic bags and coils of ribbon and string. In Wolf's photographs, these arrangements are captured as a form of urban still life. Informal assemblages of mops, brooms, chairs and shoes provide a visceral record of human activity within the alleys, often summoning imagined portraits of their creators through their anthropomorphic forms. Echoing the formal abstraction of Wolf's large scale facades, the objects are stacked, balanced, hung and wedged in response to the underlying grid of the city, intersecting with networks of pipes, doorways and railings.



Wolf has returned to particular sites as many as twenty times to capture shifting arrangements, evoking the practice of an urban anthropologist. Distilled from an archive of thousands of photographs, which form a larger ongoing encyclopedic project, Wolf has organised groups of images into typologies, according to formal principles such as colour, rhythm, structure or shape. Gathering objects as well as taking photographs, Wolf has amassed a collection of makeshift seating arrangements found in the alleyways of Hong Kong and mainland China, titled 'Bastard Chairs'. Typically comprised of fragments of broken seating, they are bound with fabric, plastic and string - balanced, propped and supported by appendages of salvaged material.

A selection of these chairs will be displayed throughout the exhibition alongside a deconstructed sculptural assemblage appropriated from a Hong Kong back alley, and arranged in the manner of an archaeological display. Re-assigning the objects as cultural artefacts, Wolf enacts the process of conservation and classification, inviting reflection on a disappearing cultural landscape, and the city-dwellers' individual attempts to adapt to the steady erosion of public space. Marc Feustel has said: *"We can only hope that Michael Wolf's photographs of the ingenuity and artistry that is evident in these spaces remain a celebration rather than a memorial."*

Informal Solutions - Observations in Hong Kong Back Alleys by Michael Wolf, with a text by Marc Feustel, is published by WE publishers, Hong Kong. Publication date: January 2016

ABOUT MICHAEL WOLF

Michael Wolf was born in Munich, Germany and lives between Hong Kong and Paris. Wolf's work has been exhibited in numerous locations, including the Venice Biennale for Architecture, Italy; Aperture gallery, New York, USA; Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere, Finland; Museum of Work, Hamburg, Germany; Hong Kong Dhenzhen Biennial, China; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, USA. His work is held in many permanent collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Brooklyn Museum, New York; The San Jose Museum of Art, California; The Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago; Museum Folkwang, Essen; and the German Museum for Architecture, Frankfurt.

He has won first prize in the World Press Photo Award competition on two occasions (2005 & 2010) and an honourable mention (2011.) In 2010, Wolf was shortlisted for the Prix Pictet photography prize.

Wolf has published 21 photo books including *Bottrop Ebel 1976* (Peperoni Press 2012); *Tokyo Compression Three* (Peperoni Press/Asia one 2012); *Architecture of Density* (Peperoni Press/Asia one 2012); *Hong Kong Corner Houses* (Hong Kong university press, 2011); *Portraits* (Superlabo, Japan, 2011); *Tokyo Compression Revisited* (Peperoni Press/Asia one 2011); *Real Fake Art* (Peperoni Press/Asia one 2011); *FY* (Peperoni Press, 2010); *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (Peperoni Press, 2010); *Tokyo Compression* (Peperoni Press/Asia one 2010); *Hong Kong Inside Outside* (Asia one/Peperoni Press 2009); *The Transparent City* (Aperture 2008); and *Sitting in China* (Steidl 2002).



Images from the series *My Favourite Thing*, 2003 -15, Archival Inkjet Print, 25.4 x 20.3 cm, 10 x 8 in, Edition of 9
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