

Chi-Wen Gallery at Frieze New York 2015 - Focus

Booth No. | D06

Represented Artist | Chien-Chi Chang

Chi-Wen Gallery for Frieze New York 2015 will present two important works by Graz, Austria-based Taiwanese artist Chien-Chi Chang (b.1961): *Escape from North Korea* (2007-2011) and *China Town* (1992-2011).

For his ongoing project *China Town* (1992-2011), Chien-Chi Chang first became interested in themes related to the dispersion of Chinese individuals and families from their homeland in 1992. In the years since he has closely followed and documented the lives of illegal immigrants in New York City's Chinatown, who left China as a matter of survival. As an artist Chien-Chi Chang explores alienation and connection between people in contemporary society by developing long-term, interactive relationships with his subjects. *China Town* consists of 18 families portrayed in sets of either 2 or 3 black/white and color photographs (total 38 pieces), together with one single-channel video.

Again using the medium of photography and video as his artistic medium, *Escape from North Korea* (2007-2011) records the dangerous journey by North Korean defectors, travelling over 5000 miles and crossing China and Laos, into Thailand. This contemporary narrative of historical significance continues with the defectors facing the new challenge of starting a new life in South Korea. *Escape from North Korea* consists of a single-channel video installation and seven B/W and color photographs.

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Artwork descriptions

***Escape from North Korea* | 2007- 2011**

Complete Works | Edition of 5

Silver gelatin print, 40 x 50 inches, 2009 and 2011, 6 photos | Chromogenic print, 15x20 inches, 2011, 1 photo | Single-channel video, 5min 40sec, 2009

The exodus of North Korean defectors into China began in late 1990s after a severe famine that destroyed at least one million of its 23 million people. Once they cross the border to China, they'll be in hiding and waiting to embark on an extremely secretive, dangerous escape route, known as *Asia's Underground Railroad* from northern China all the way to Laos, crossing Mekong River, to Thailand and finally to South Korea.

The unpredictable journey can take weeks, months or even years. Chinese police routinely hunt for North Koreans attempting to escape cross-country. Police crackdowns can net hundreds of victims. If they are caught while escaping in China and Laos, they will be repatriated to North Korea, facing severe labor camps or capital punishment. Magnum photographer Chien-Chi Chang traveled with the defectors to document the darkest journey in 2007 and 2008. To date, He has continued to document the plight of North Korean defectors.



Escape from North Korea, Single-channel video, 5min 40sec, 2009

Courtesy of the artist, Magnum Photos and Chi-Wen Gallery

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台北市大安區106敦化南路一段252巷19號3樓 3F/No.19/Lane 252/Tun-Hua S. Road/Sec. 1/Taipei/Taiwan
Tel: +886-2- 8771 3372/Fax: +886-2-8771 3421/Email: info@chi-wen.com/www.chiwengallery.com

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Defector, Silver gelatin print, 40 x 50 inches, 2009
Courtesy of the artist, Magnum Photos and Chi-Wen Gallery



Great Leader and Dear Leader, Silver gelatin print, 40 x 50 inches, 2011
Courtesy of the artist, Magnum Photos and Chi-Wen Gallery

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China Town | 1992-2011

Complete Works | Edition of 5

Silver gelatin print and Chromogenic print, 23.x 38 inches, 38 photos | Single-channel video, 19min 23sec, 1992-2011

Immigration is propelled by suffering. To witness the shifting patterns of populations is to see the world in all its exigencies—war, natural disasters, repression, famine, poverty and persecution. But there is a rainbow at the bottom of that Pandora's box of troubles; hope, too, propels immigrants to settle in strange lands.

Perhaps the most aspirational of the world's people are the Chinese. For them, New York's Chinatown is the capital city of promise, the place you go to make a new life for your family, a fortune. It is no coincidence that the boatload of illegal immigrants who grounded on a New York City beach in 1993 sailed on a ship called the *Golden Venture*. And this movement of people is an increasingly critical social issue. As the relationship between the U.S. and China grows ever more complex on an economic level, these individual stories, too, are weaving together the future of two nations.

To contrast the bleak, black-and-white lives of the men in the U.S. Chien-Chi Chang chose to photograph the families in China in color. Like the families who have granted access to him, the project has also grown and changed over the years. In 2005 he began using audio recordings and, in 2007, video recordings to continue to document the divided families. Now he is ready to move the project to a higher dimension through the combination of still images and moving images within soundscape. And, ultimately, to do what has never been done before—to make these invisible families, with their sufferings and triumphs, at last visible.

The past 20 years of developing these relationships are now culminating in a tri-generational drama. Some of the first waves of illegal immigrants are choosing to return to China to enjoy the prosperity they have created there and spend the rest of their lives with family members they have not seen for nearly two decades. Yet their sons still choose to be smuggled to New York, leaving their own families behind. Divided families remain divided.

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