

Wang Wei, Ko Sin Tung *Muse for a Mimeticist*
Edouard Malingue Gallery, Shanghai 24 June – 20 August

The term 'mimeticism' was adopted by Wang Wei and Ko Sin Tung as a reaction to the established realist mode in Chinese art used to represent the official socialist ideology. However, each artist approaches the issue differently. Having trained in China's academic tradition of Socialist Realism – in particular, that of propaganda murals – Wang Wei is well versed in the vocabulary and logic of the politicisation of art, and turned to mimeticism in order to deconstruct it. For Ko Sin Tung, more than ten years Wang's junior, the appeal of mimeticism emerged from living in Hong Kong, and the pressures that an individual absorbs from an ever more stringent social mechanism.

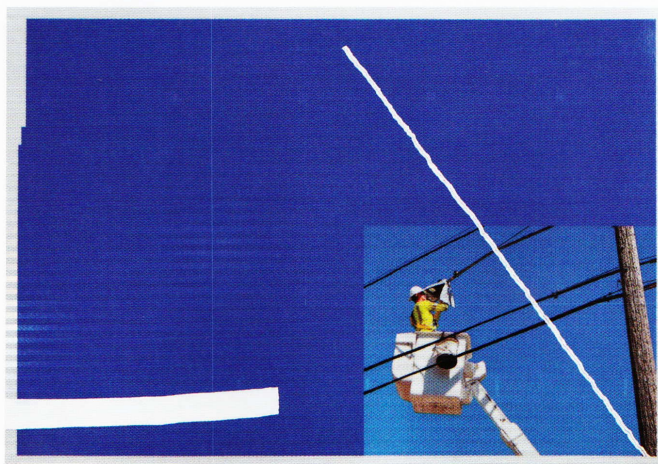
While Wang Wei's *What you see is not what you see* (all works 2017) is given the dominant position in the gallery (its entire main wall), it appears to blend into its surroundings, almost as if camouflaged. The mosaic mural mirrors the interior of the gallery space: one can make out essential components such as the windows, pillars, a few chairs and a blurred image of one of Ko's works across the room. The readymade tiles from which it is assembled come in a limited range of colours, giving the image a dim tone, lacking in the kind of colour spectrum that might make it seem truly realistic. The work is completed by a few sections in which the tiles

have been peeled off to create the impression of an aged and worn mural: a step towards its appearing to be an authentic, 'functioning' object. *What you see is not what you see* is a new addition to Wang's systematic recreations of one space within another, in which he continuously interrupts the given space or setting with modified architectural structures, and challenges the viewer's perception. Indeed, often, the disturbance of the physical environments is intensified by frictions between individual visitors' perception and cognition of the space as a whole. Such frictions are further explored in Wang's *Natural History 4 (Portrait)*, comprising 13 smaller square mosaics. In each a series of sapphire-blue tiles are scattered through an otherwise flesh-coloured grid. Though the patterns are made randomly, they provoke a tendency to perceive the compositions as human faces. Wang's two sets of works eliminated the artist's control of the figurative narrative: imagery is reconstructed in the perception of the viewer, which is itself subject to individual memories and contexts.

While Wang rejects his formal education in realism by avoiding narrative, Hong Kong-based Ko Sin Tung addresses the increasing national pressures faced by the city's populace with works that reflect on the conflict between

the identities of Hong Kong and Greater China. She uses everyday materials: shattered pieces of a wide-angle traffic mirror, a fraction of a print advertisement showing sunflowers and a safety helmet, hazard lights used on construction sites and LED street lamps. While these objects originally functioned with the intention of improving efficiency within the urban environment, here they seem to represent the artist's own anxieties about the intensity of living conditions in Hong Kong.

In response to the city's current and uncertain political outlook, *Sunflower and safety helmet* serves as an empathetic nod to the 2014 Sunflower Student Movement held in Taipei. Each time she modifies, dismembers and reassembles these objects and images. Ko stages a microprotest, dealing with her own frustration with the impotence of art in Hong Kong's political context, as well as her powerless position in the face of the ongoing social transformation of her city. Ko's transposition of these objects and images can be read as an attempt to beam a sequence of discreet codes that signal her sociopolitical inclinations. Here, Ko transfers the responsibility of an explicit interpretation to the viewer, while outlining the circumscription of the artist's own social intervention. *Li Qi*



Ko Sin Tung, *One day, workers replaced the traditional high pressure sodium street lights with the new LED ones*, 2017, enamel paint, acrylic, digital print on aluminium plates, 103 × 72 cm. Courtesy the artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery, Shanghai & Hong Kong