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# Christina Li on “Days push off into nights” at Spring Workshop


BY DARRYL WEE | MARCH 03, 2015



Curator Christina Li.  
(Photo by Xue Tan )

HONG KONG — As Hong Kong gears up for a pumped week of exhibitions, showmanship, and preening in and around the main event of Art Basel next month, some quarters of the city’s slowly burgeoning non-profit art scene are striking a very different tone.

One of these is [Spring Workshop](#), a non-profit arts space privately funded by Hong Kong-based art lovers. Based in the vibrant Wong Chuk Hang district since August 2012, Spring embraces an eclectic range of activities encompassing artist and curator residencies, exhibitions, concerts, performances, and talks.



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On February 28, Spring will open *Days push off into nights*, “a series of situations” devised by a diverse crew of artists including **Moyra Davey**, **Elmgreen & Dragset**, **Cevdet Erek**, **Lee Kit**, **Job Koelewijn**, **Jewyo Rhii**, and **Magdalen Wong** that collectively represent a space of stillness, solitude, and quiet reflection — an antidote to the hyper-accelerated pace of production often demanded of the contemporary art world.

BLOUIN ARTINFO sat down with curator **Christina Li** to talk about the ideological implications behind this “space of stillness” and the different notions of duration evoked by the featured artworks that extend over and beyond the limited time frame of a physical exhibition.

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**This exhibition seems to be conceived as a purposeful, almost self-imposed exercise in slowing down, both in terms of the frenetic rhythms of urban life, but also the entire accelerated process of art production in the contemporary sphere. What does this experience of “slowness” mean to you?**

For me, one very good embodiment of this experience of slowness can be found in train travel — something that I have grown to welcome, and opt for, over short haul air travel. There is a lot to be said about the time that is produced while moving at a reduced speed, with limited internet access and distractions, in an unhurried state that offers a different mode of concentration — and sometimes, the necessary boredom and empty time to clear one’s thoughts to read, write, think, or even just daydream, all of which I feel are so much lacking in our very task-driven lives.

**Speaking of slowness, I’m reminded of Nicolas Bourriaud’s Taipei Biennial 2014, which had the theme “The Great Acceleration.” Bourriaud’s show contained many works that seemed to revel in the heady experience of art making in the context of late capitalist society and the so-called age of the Anthropocene, where human activities now exert an unprecedented impact on natural ecosystems, whether it’s in terms of environmental degradation or the world of global capital flows and high finance. Do you think that the experience of reflective contemplation and a greatly slowed-down art practice can still make a strong political statement?**

Even though it was not my intention to frame the show as such, *Days push off into nights* focuses on experiences of reflective contemplation, and practices that are drawn out or process-centered. One might understand this as one of the many reactions towards the shortening and commodification of time in global neoliberalism.

That said, I feel that both the show and the artworks in it depart from the artists’ personal observations and experiences, informed and shaped by their own relationship to politics and the world. It reminds me of a piece I read in the New Yorker by Giles Harvey about his experience watching Philip Glass’ opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), which I could relate to after seeing this five-hour long piece, where Harvey defends the indispensability of the slow, demanding artwork in our era of speed. Perhaps the slowness in Glass’ work is not an outright political gesture as such, but rather a statement that makes us reconsider what we have been conditioned to accept as norms, political or otherwise.

**Several artworks in this show unfold gradually over a duration that is much longer than the attention span — or leisure time allotment, as it were — of a typical viewer. Magdalen Wong’s installation, for instance, consists of rolls of metallic tape that slowly get pulled down by gravity over the course of the exhibition, while Cevdet Ereğ’s “SSS — Shore Scene Soundtrack” is initially performed by local Hong Kong musicians at the opening before reverting to a dormant state, periodically reactivated by visitors to the gallery. Do you see these works as being somehow autonomous, and perhaps even aloof, from the audience?**

*Days push off into nights* presents a series of situations, and the individual works are documentations and ongoing fragments of the participating artists’ everyday experiences, such as observing, reading, writing, or listening to our surroundings. There are two dimensions to this exhibition. One looks at lived time — time and experiences that have a past — while the other explores the idea of ongoing time, where these live works change and grow as the exhibition progresses.

I have chosen works with different time spans and tempos to show the various possible scenarios that might emerge from such moments of concentration, and the contemplation of one’s surroundings. In that sense, even though the works by Magdalen Wong and Cevdet Ereğ are presented in an exhibition context, they point to everyday situations. I think it’s important to keep the “autonomy” of the works — where traces of time are left behind on Wong’s tapes, whether the audience notices them or not, for example, or when the audience is invited to listen to or create sonic seaside recollections within Ereğ’s work.

I see this as a shift away from a more spectacular form of exhibition making, or as an attempt to come a bit closer to the everyday, and to try to blur the distinction between what you call “attention span” and “leisure time allotment,” particularly in this exhibition.

**Alongside your exhibition making activities, you’ve also been working with Singaporean artist Heman Chong to put together a collection of short stories called “Stationary” that was released last month. Was this publication also inspired by the slowed-down experience of contemplation highlighted in “Days push off into nights”?**

The beginnings of this exhibition are loosely connected to the first in a series of books that Heman Chong and I have worked on for the past year called *Stationary*, which will be available in print this month. It emerged out of a conversation back in 2013 with **Mimi Brown**, the founder of Spring Workshop, where we talked about trying to produce a literary space — not unlike the physical residency program at Spring — in which a handful of artists, curators, and writers are invited to elaborate on their own interests within the pages of a book.

Like this book, *Days push off into nights* is very much connected to the notion of time, as well as the meaningful and sometimes mundane events and situations that take place during its passing. In spite of the loose connection, *Days push off into nights* is not meant as an illustration of *Stationary* and the stories it contains. Rather, I conceived it as a way of making palpable these poetic traces left behind by the intimate and stationary moments that occur within the physical space of an exhibition.



You’ve also accepted a one-year directorship of Spring Workshop starting in August this year. What can we look forward to at Spring during the time that you will be there?

My appointment as director will commence in August, and while *Days push off into nights* was curated separately, it foreshadows my curatorial interest; exploring the expanses in which ephemeral practices and art objects could intersect. Having spent 6 years in Amsterdam, this directorship is also a homecoming adventure for me. Spring has a relatively short institutional history, and has hosted and presented an outstanding multidisciplinary program, and I look very much forward to becoming part of the new chapter.

*Days push off into nights* runs February 28 through April 26, 2015 at Spring Workshop (3/F, Remex Centre, 42 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong).

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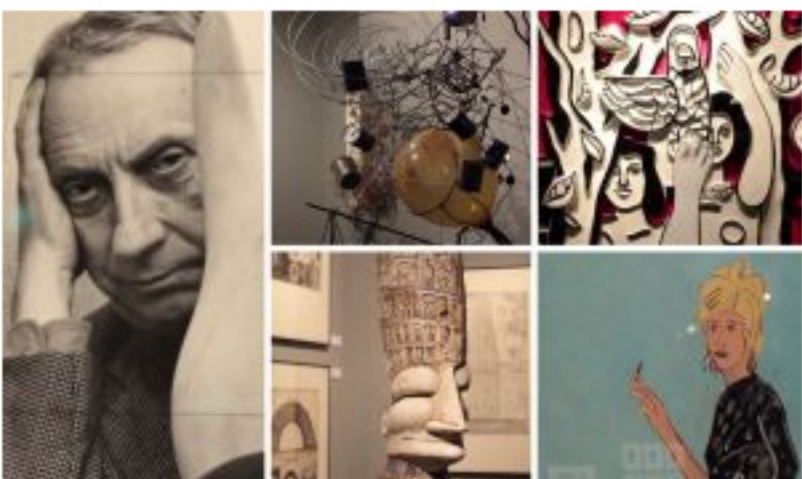
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