

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



Tseng Kwong Chi, *New York, New York (Empire State)*, 1979, silver gelatin print, 91.44 x 91.44cm (36 x 36 in.), Edition of 9 + 2AP

TSENG KWONG CHI: East Meets West Self-portrait series, 1979-1989

10 January 2020 - 9 March 2020

Private View: Thursday, 9 January, 6-8pm

Gallery talk with Muna Tseng: Wednesday, 8 January, 6- 7pm

Ben Brown Fine Arts Hong Kong is pleased to present *Tseng Kwong Chi: East Meets West, Self-portrait series 1979-1989*, a comprehensive exhibition of the Hong Kong-born artist's pioneering body of photographic work. This is the second solo exhibition of Tseng Kwong Chi's work at the gallery. Tseng Kwong Chi (1950-1990) was not only a photographer but a performance artist, provocateur and documentarian who traversed the globe subversively and playfully exploring notions of cultural identity, perception and the role of the individual amidst iconic and sublime locations of the world. This exhibition brings together the artist's iconic black and white self-portraits, and large-scale photographs produced in collaboration with the artist's estate.

Tseng Kwong Chi arrived on the downtown art scene of New York City in the late 1970s, where his circle included Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Tseng's artistic identity was born when he arrived at the upscale, touristic restaurant, Windows on the World in the World Trade Towers, to dine with his visiting parents donning a Mao suit he had picked up at a thrift shop. While his parents were dismayed—his father had served in the Nationalist Army—the unsuspecting maître

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d' treated him as a foreign dignitary all evening. From that moment on, the struggling young artist assumed the identity of an ambiguous Chinese statesman, appearing at exclusive events and tourist meccas in the United States and Europe, solemnly posing in his Mao costume and ID badge, with reflective sunglasses and an army-style haircut, playing upon particular Western stereotypes and notions of Asians.

The exhibition includes many of the artist's most iconic *East Meets West* self-portraits such as *New York, New York (Empire State)*, 1979; *New York, New York (Brooklyn Bridge)*, 1979; and *Rome, Italy (Coliseum, Day)*, 1989. In 1987, Tseng began working with a Hasselblad camera, its long cable manned for the first time by an assistant which enabled the artist to depict himself in vast, natural landscapes. These more contemplative yet characteristically sardonic self-portraits, such as *Canadian Rockies (Forest)*, 1986; *Grand Canyon, Arizona (Vista with Shadow)*, 1987; and *Lightning Field, North Dakota (Left)*, 1987, recall the work of Caspar David Friedrich, Albert Bierstadt and the American Hudson River School painters with their earnest search for the sublime in nature. Also included in the exhibition is a large format (180 x 180cm) edition of *New York, New York (Statue of Liberty)*, 1979, produced by the artist's estate.

About the artist

Tseng Kwong Chi, the son of exiled Chinese nationalists, was born in Hong Kong in 1950 and educated at St. Joseph's Boys School. He developed an interest in photography at a young age when his father gave him his vintage Rolleiflex camera. At the age of 16, Tseng and his family emigrated to Canada, where he attended universities in Vancouver and Montreal, before moving to Paris where he studied art and photography at the Académie Julian. In 1979 he settled in New York City where he found his artistic milieu in the East Village. Tseng viewed himself as a citizen of the world: equally comfortable speaking French, English or Chinese, neither an insider nor outsider wherever he went, using his concocted identity as an instrument to appraise the world around him. His work, which fused conceptual, performance and fine art, not to mention his prescient practice of taking 'selfies' predating the social media era, continues to influence generations of young artists today. The work of Tseng Kwong Chi is in numerous public collections, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Tate Britain, London; and Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis.

For further press information and enquires please contact:

Ben Brown Fine Arts
Juliana Chan
T. +852 2522 9600
E. juliana@benbrownfinearts.com
W. www.benbrownfinearts.com

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