

PREVIEW

Memory and Fiction

Blindspot Gallery

Jan 11 to Feb 4

During the 1980s and 90s, when nothing was going to get in the way of progress in this city, least of all a few derelict old buildings, Wong Wo-bik went to a number of historical landmarks that were soon to be torn down and took photos.

Her mission wasn't so much to document history as to capture, and sometimes reinvent, stories behind these places she visited.

"Today, we talk a lot about preserving our collective memory but that wasn't my intention then," the photographer says. "My interest was in the architecture of some of these historical buildings and the stories behind the people who owned these decrepit properties."

A selection of photographs that Wong took over three decades, including images of long-gone places such as Lai Yuen Amusement Park and the castle-like family mansions of businessman Eu Tong Sen, will go on show at Blindspot Gallery in Central this week.

The retrospective is inspired by a book on Wong's work (*Hong Kong/China Photographers Four – Wong Wo Bik*) that was published by Asia One in 2009. Wong is one of the founding members of the Hong Kong Photo Festival and has been a museum adviser to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department since 1996. However, her works are not

historical records as some of the photographs have been subtly altered and manipulated.

"The Chinese for 'fabrication' is very negative; it suggests that something is fake or insincere," says Wong. "However, I think by adding layers onto an image, it enriches the work; it also makes the viewers think: what is real? What is unreal? I think I have always been greatly influenced by *Last Year in Marienbad* [a French movie classic from 1961], which is a crossover between reality and fantasy."

Wong left Hong Kong in 1975 to study in the US. She received her bachelor of fine art degree in sculpture and printmaking from the Columbus College of Art and Design in Ohio in 1977, and then a master's in photography from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University, in 1979. She returned in 1980 to find a city undergoing transformation.

"I used to take strolls in the Mid-Levels to look at abandoned properties. Some of the architecture up was fascinating as it revealed something about the people who used to live there and, perhaps, how they led their lives. There must have been lots of stories about these people. My photographs are attempts to retell and even reinvent some of these stories."

Kevin Kwong

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