

Huang Po-Chih Blue Elephant

November 27, 2021 to
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Curator: Heike Eipeldauer
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Barbara Schneider
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Huang Po-Chih's multidisciplinary practice, which encompasses various artistic media as well as literature, agribusiness, textiles manufacturing, and social entrepreneurship, reflects Taiwan's changing identity discourse over the past decades. Born in 1980 in Taoyuan to the southwest of Taipei, Huang Po-Chih belongs to a generation of artists that was socialized during an era of democratic reforms and high economic growth in Taiwan following the end of martial law in 1987. While Taiwan's self-image was long inward-looking, shaped by Japanese occupation, the country's role in the Cold War, and claims of sovereignty from the People's Republic of China, since the turn of the century a transnational vision has emerged that takes local, East Asian, and global perspectives equally into account. The political status of Taiwan nonetheless remains contested: in the struggle with the USA for dominance in the Pacific Ocean region, the People's Republic of China, with its aspirations to super power status, is again making threatening gestures toward the island state with a view to reunification, which from the Taiwanese perspective would amount to annexation.

Blue Elephant, the first solo exhibition by Huang Po-Chih outside of Asia, interweaves the turbulent political history and "schizophrenic" situation of Taiwan with the rise and fall of the East Asian textiles industry and global social and economic upheavals. Huang Po-Chih addresses these from the perspective of subjective narratives of individual protagonists, first and foremost his own mother, a former textiles worker. She is the main character in the artist's essay *Blue Skin* (2011–2013), and his accomplice and artistic collaborator. "Blue elephant" was the textiles workers' own tongue-in-cheek term for themselves, referring to their swollen legs due to permanent physical duress and also to their hands stained by blue denim. At the same time the elephant was also a symbol for laborers used in Taiwanese propaganda as an attempt to increase productivity. For Huang Po-Chih the image of the elephant also implies the dependency and rivalry between the four main centers of the textiles industry in Asia from the 1960s to the 1980s: China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea. Against this, Huang Po-Chih posits the shared experiences of workers from these four "tiger states," and in a series of photographs the workers playfully and performatively appropriate the motif of the elephant.

For the multi-part project *Production Line – Made in China & Made in Taiwan* (2014–2021) Huang's mother and other former textiles workers took part in a temporary production line for denim shirts, which Huang Po-Chih set up between the Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2014) and the Taipei Biennale (2014). He thereby created a space for communality within the institutional framework of art, where fundamental mechanisms of global capitalism, from production, trade, exchange, and consumption, were challenged, and where alternative social relations, empowerment, and interdisciplinary collaboration were implemented. Visitors were able to take part as co-producers within a two-day working employment "contract," thereby gaining not just a denim shirt but also taking part in the stories of textiles workers that are otherwise lost within globally organized mass production and fast fashion trade.

A textiles market in Hong Kong that is presently under threat of demolition, and which is an important social hub for Chinese immigrants, is the starting point in Huang's most recent video work, *Seven People Crossing the Sea* (2019–2021), which uses the experiences of local protagonists to challenge the hierarchies in the global distribution of work and resources. At the center is Ho Ying, a Chinese immigrant, who—searching for his own "Hong Kong dream"—swam across the ocean with six friends and became a seller at the Pang Jai Fabric Market. One of the last remaining stand owners, he initiated a broad anti-relocation movement that raised questions about the legitimacy of the traders and the market as a living space for a socially marginalized group. His protest banner sewn from materials from the market serves as a curtain in front of the projection room in this exhibition. In his video, Huang Po-Chih experiments with the fictitious re-enactment of subjective experiences. The narrative draws on short stories by the Hongkong writer Hon Lai-Chu and the artist himself, which were written on the basis of conversations with Ho Ying.

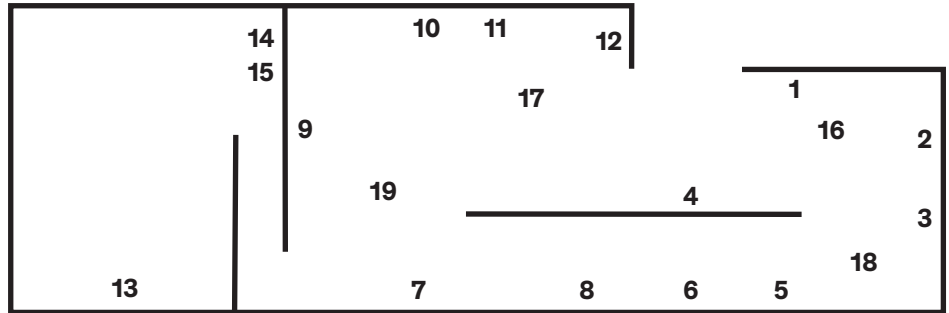
As an artist, author, collaborator, and initiator of processes of social exchange, Huang undertakes a significant analysis of contemporary affairs, showing that art can have a political effect whenever references to reality and social interventions are productively linked with aesthetic experience and artistic ambiguity.

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Level –3



1
Blue Skin. My Mother's Story, Taipei 2013 (in Chinese)
35 Books
Courtesy the artist

2
Blue Elephant—Mother
2018
Photograph
Courtesy of MMCA, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul

3
Production Line—You Are a Blue Elephant
2021
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

4
Production Line
2014–21
Denim shirts
Courtesy of Taipei Fine Art Museum

5
Portrait of Hsu Yue-Jen
2015 (1972)
Photograph
Courtesy the artist

6
Aunt Wu in Shenzhen
2015
Photograph
Courtesy the artist

7
Blue Elephant—Master Cheung and Aunt Hang
2019
Photograph
Courtesy of CHAT, Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textile, Hong Kong

8
Production Line—Shenzhen, Shenzhen!
2021
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

9
43 Years of Social Economic Productivity Could Be Destroyed. Demand The Government To Be Humane.
2021
Recycled fabric
Courtesy of Ho Ying

10
Blue Elephant—Ms. Kim
2021
Photograph
Courtesy the artist

11
Blue Elephant—Ms. Kim
2021
Photograph
Courtesy the artist

12
Production Line—Sorry, today I don't have a day off.
2021
Blue ballpoint pen on paper, mounted on cotton board
Courtesy the artist

13
Seven People Crossing the Sea
2019–21
Video, 17 min
Courtesy of CHAT, Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textile, Hong Kong and C-LAB Taiwan, Contemporary Culture Lab, Taipei

14
Racing Pigeons by Huang Po-Chih
2021
Booklet

15
That's the Sea by Hon Lai-Chu
2021
Booklet

16
„The Blue Skin“, excerpt from Huang Po-Chih, *Blue Skin. My Mother's Story*, Taipei 2011–13, translated by Darryl Sterk

17
„When Curiosity Was the Only Luxury“, excerpt from Huang Po-Chih, *Blue Skin. My Mother's Story*, Taipei 2011–13, translated by Darryl Sterk

18
„The Second Skin“, excerpt from Huang Po-Chih, *Blue Skin. My Mother's Story*, Taipei 2011–13, translated by Darryl Sterk

19
„Second Brother's Turtledove“, excerpt from Huang Po-Chih, *Blue Skin. My Mother's Story*, Taipei 2011–13, translated by Darryl Sterk

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