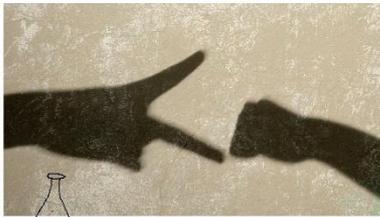


FRANCIS ALÿS'S FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION IN HONG KONG AT TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY

Hong Kong, 27 October 2020, Tuesday

FRANCIS ALÿS

水限_陸界, 邊境與遊戲



Wet feet __ dry feet, borders
and games



Tai Kwun Contemporary is proud to announce *Wet feet __ dry feet: borders and games*, a solo exhibition by Francis Alÿs, one of the most influential conceptual artists of our time. Structured around the artist's interest in migration, borders, and his fascination with children's games from around the world, this exhibition brings together for the first time in Hong Kong three important and interconnected projects by Alÿs, including newly commissioned videos by Tai Kwun Contemporary. The exhibition runs from 28 October 2020 to February 2021.

Critically acclaimed and internationally admired, Francis Alÿs (b. 1959, Belgium; based in Mexico since 1986) has a complex and at times elusive artistic practice that poetically fuses an imaginative, conceptual sensibility with the socio-political momentousness of issues related to urban spaces, transnational borders, and geopolitical concerns. While his works are charged with political concerns, what is significant is how he opens up an artistic space for doubt and invention—often through ephemeral actions initiated and documented by the artist which leave no trace and yet conjure up fables.

Curated by Xue Tan and Sunjung Kim and co-presented by Tai Kwun Contemporary and Art Sonje Center, Seoul, the exhibition's title is based on the "spark" to Alÿs's works on view—the "Wet Feet, Dry Feet" policy on Cuban refugees in 1995. Under this policy, Cuban migrants headed for the United States faced vastly different treatment depending on whether they were intercepted at sea or on land, on US soil. If intercepted at sea ("wet feet"), they would be repatriated back to Cuba; if intercepted on land ("dry feet"), they would be allowed to stay in the United States. For a Hong Kong audience, this might sound uncannily familiar: the "Touch Base" policy in 1970s Hong Kong meant that Mainland Chinese migrants would be sent back to the Mainland if intercepted at sea or in the New Territories; only if they

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reached south of Boundary Street—the formal boundary between Kowloon and the New Territories—were migrants allowed to stay legally in the territory (in the quirky British sports reference, “touch base”).

Borders and games



Francis Alÿs, *Don't Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the River*, August 12, 2008,
Tangier, Morocco – Tarifa, Spain, Strait of Gibraltar

In collaboration with Rafael Ortega, Julien Devaux, Felix Blume, Ivan Boccara, Abbas Benhim, Fundación Montenmedio Arte
and the kids of Tangier and Tarifa

Video and photographic documentation of an action, 2 video projections, 7'44"

The connection between borders and games in Francis Alÿs's artistic practice lies at the heart of the exhibition. After his quixotic attempt to connect Havana and Key West, Florida by means of a bridge of boats from fishing communities and private individuals in *Bridge/Puente* (2006), the artist shifted his attention to the narrower Strait of Gibraltar, a waterway 13 km wide, with the imaginative impulse of connecting Northern Africa and Southern Europe with a line of fishing boats—which was later enacted metaphorically by groups of children departing from the shores with “shoe boats”, tiny boats made with babouches and flip-flop sandals. In a process that took two years of preparation, the artist evaded interference and interest from various parties, and filmed the final performance as a “Children's Game”.

Presented alongside the video installation *Don't Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the River* (2008) are over 100 paintings, drawings and notes drafted during the preparation of the project. While working with children for this project, Alÿs was reminded of his long-time observation of children at play, particularly their appropriation of public spaces for play and their strong sense of moving freely within “rules”.

Children's Games



Francis Alÿs (In collaboration with Elena Pardo and Félix Blume), *Children's Game #12, Sillas Musicales* (Musical Chairs), Oaxaca, Mexico, 2012. Video, 5:05 min.

His latest on-going project, *Children's Games* (1999–ongoing), consists of more than 20 documentary videos of children at play in various locations; some were filmed in countries that have suffered from ongoing war and conflicts, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, while other places were shot in Nepal, Jordan, Mexico, France, and Hong Kong—the last featuring newly commissioned videos by Tai Kwun Contemporary. Without ever becoming directly involved, the artist documents children moving about in their own ways and playing their games—games which also echo the rituals, symbols, insights, superstitions and events of the specific society, culture, and locality. *Children's Games* is in the vein of his artistic practice—touching poetically on conceptual displacement and alluding lightly, whimsically on politics and social engagement. Viewers can observe a poignant sense of innocence and the redemptive power of play—universal and transcending conventions, languages, and borders.

Tobias Berger, Head of Art, Tai Kwun, said, “We chose to work with Francis Alÿs because he has been very influential in Hong Kong for a group of artists with a certain type of artistic practice. We are delighted to show this exhibition—having worked on this project for nearly three years now—and elated that the artist has managed to come to Hong Kong in person during this difficult time.”

Xue Tan, Curator of *Wet feet __ dry feet: borders and games* from Tai Kwun, said, “I am thrilled to have been able to work with Francis Alÿs, an artist whom I have admired for years. This exhibition is conceived for Hong Kong, and so the fact we have been able to film additional children's games in Hong Kong—despite the pandemic and travel restrictions—is significant. It speaks to how art can rise above difficulties, and how a great artist creates under all circumstances.”

Public Programmes

Tai Kwun Contemporary Weekend Guided Tour



大館當代美術館 導賞團
GUIDED TOUR AT
TAI KWUN CONTEMPORARY

Come spend your weekends at Tai Kwun Contemporary. Learn about the art exhibitions by joining a tour with one of our professional, friendly docents.

Date: Every Saturdays and Sundays (starting from November; please check the Tai Kwun website for the latest updates on event dates) Time: 2:00pm-3:00pm (Cantonese), 4:00pm-5:00pm (English)

Free admission; register on the Tai Kwun website

Family Fun Guided Tour (for ages 5+)

Join Tai Kwun Contemporary for a fun Family Tour, which welcomes 1 parent/guardian participating together with 1 child. Participants will be fully engaged in the selected artworks through visual references in the form of a tour guide booklet.

Date: Designated Sundays (starting from November; please check the Tai Kwun website for the latest updates on event dates)

Time: 11:00am-12:00pm, 3:00pm-4:00pm

Free admission; register on the Tai Kwun website

Family Day at Tai Kwun Contemporary: Family Tour and Workshop “The Ping-Pong Friends”



The Family Tour consists of guiding participants through artworks based on the exhibitions with interactive discussions and visual references in the form of an in-depth tour guide booklet. In the workshop, participants will cut out two countries on the world map and use them as patterns to make wooden ping-pong bats. After completion, children can play a two-player game and become players of that country. Pass the ball and praise each other at the same time. Children can understand each other and become friends through the activity. All activities are designed to welcome 1 parent/guardian participating together with 1 child (5+ years).

Date: 1, 15 & 29 November, 13 & 27 December 2020, 10 January 2021 (Every other Sundays)

Time: 3pm-5pm (Bilingual)

Tickets: HK \$80 per timeslot for one family pair (one adult with one child). Get tickets on Tai Kwun website

Visitor information

Wet feet __ dry feet: borders and games is on view from 28 October through February 2021, every Tuesday to Sunday from 11am to 7pm at JC Contemporary in Tai Kwun. Free admission, with guided tours and related public programmes available. Along with *Wet feet __ dry feet: borders and games*, visitors can visit *SNEEZE*, a solo exhibition by Mika Rottenberg featuring four video installations that create surreal alternative worlds of global everyday life.

The entire site of Tai Kwun is open to the public daily from 10am to 11pm, while Tai Kwun Contemporary at JC Contemporary is open from Tuesday to Sunday from 11am to 7pm. Visitors are encouraged to book their free Tai Kwun Pass online via https://www.taikwun.hk/en/visit/taikwun_pass prior to visiting for guaranteed admission. Walk-ins are also welcome, subject to site capacity conditions.

Please note that appropriate sanitary measures are in place with regards to the ongoing coronavirus situation.

— End —

Editor's notes:

Please click [here](#) to download exhibition guide, and hi-res images with captions.

About Francis Alÿs

Francis Alÿs (b. 1959, Belgium; based in Mexico) has a complex and at times elusive artistic practice that poetically fuses an imaginative, conceptual sensibility with the socio-political momentousness of issues related to urban spaces, transnational borders, and geopolitical structures.

Trained first as an architect, after moving to Mexico Alÿs shifted towards art making, relishing its freedom and flexibility. Through observations of and engagements with Mexico's vast urban fabric and everyday life, Alÿs has presented artistic arguments in the form of parables, opening a space for imagination as well as dislocating the sense of the ordinary. In *Paradox of Praxis 1 (Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing)* (1997), for instance, Alÿs pushed a large block of ice through the streets of Mexico City, until the ice fully melted. Absurd yet starry-eyed, the work invites wonder but also evokes awareness of the spatial plane of the street, with its hubbub of pedestrians and street vendors, and indeed a whole economy that depends on ice in tropical climes. Many early works focused on Mexico have some aspect of "blue-collar conceptualism".

Among a diverse range of works, one has also seen Alÿs take on a certain naturalistic heroic romanticism with his efforts of entering the eye of tornados, while in other works, his engagement with boundaries and borders invest his oeuvre with a more overt sense of politics. *The Loop* (1997), for instance, involved Alÿs circumnavigating the world in an opposite direction in order to get from Tijuana, Mexico, to San Diego, California, without ever crossing the US-Mexican border. In *The Green Line (Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Become Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Become Poetic)* (2004), Alÿs walked along the border between Palestine and Israel—a border though contested was not immediately apparent to the eye, despite its name—while holding a can of green paint, dribbling a line of green paint behind him.

More recently, Francis Alÿs has come to realise that one important element of his oeuvre involves children at play, through his videos relating to the everyday actions of the street life or to the large-scale performances about borders. This brings a different dimension of the universal fable that has always been inherent in his work, combining play, innocence, and observation, through a poetic sense of dislocation that offers a liberating vision while commenting on socio-political issues of norms, languages, and borders.

Alÿs has had solo exhibitions around the world, including at the Tate Modern, London; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Kunsthaus Zurich, Switzerland; Museo de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; among many others. He has participated in Venice Biennales held in 1999, 2001, and 2007; in particular, he sent a peacock in his stead for the 2001 Venice Biennale. Alÿs has also taken part in dOCUMENTA (13) in 2012.

About Tai Kwun — Centre for Heritage and Arts (Tai Kwun)

Tai Kwun is Hong Kong's Centre for Heritage and Arts — a cultural destination for inspiration, stimulation and enjoyment. We aspire to offer the best heritage and arts experiences, and to cultivate knowledge and appreciation of contemporary art, performing arts and history in the community.

Tai Kwun invites all visitors on a journey of discovery that fuses across multiple genres of arts, heritage, culture and lifestyle in Hong Kong. Here, visitors will discover the rich heritage of the site through the thematic exhibitions and immersive public programmes that explore Hong Kong's history and culture, alongside a multitude of vibrant and inclusive contemporary art presentations and performing arts offerings all year round.

Opened in May 2018 and operating on a not-for-profit model, Tai Kwun is the fruition of a joint partnership between The Hong Kong Jockey Club and the Government of the HKSAR to conserve and revitalise the buildings of the historic Central Police Station compound, which represents one of the most significant revitalisation projects in Hong Kong. The site comprises three Declared Monuments of Hong Kong – the former Central Police Station, Central Magistracy and Victoria Prison, all have been meticulously conserved, with unfailing attention to authenticity. The site also includes two new buildings – JC Contemporary and JC Cube, by renowned architects Herzog & de Meuron; and several outdoor spaces – Parade Ground, Prison Yard and Laundry Steps, providing an exciting venue for the public programmes presented by Tai Kwun and its partners.

Tai Kwun, which means “big station” in Chinese, is the colloquial name used by Hong Kong people to refer to the former police headquarters and the surrounding compound. The name has been adopted as a reminder of the historical importance of this living heritage site.

In 2019, Tai Kwun received the Award of Excellence in the 2019 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation. This is the highest honour of the prestigious Awards, which bestows an international recognition of the outstanding achievement in the conservation and revitalisation efforts of Tai Kwun.

Tai Kwun Contemporary is the not-for-profit visual art programme of Tai Kwun. Realising six to eight exhibitions a year and curatorially driven, Tai Kwun Contemporary showcases and commissions artists from Hong Kong and beyond, while offering an extensive range of public programming. With the aspiration to contribute to and transform the experience and understanding of contemporary art in Hong Kong, Tai Kwun Contemporary is devoted to inspiring the Hong Kong public with an inquisitive attitude and committed to offering a conducive platform for learning and experimentation.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://www.TaiKwun.hk>.

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