

living in design

A photograph of a modern, white, minimalist house. The house features a large, curved window with a black frame. A young girl in a black and white patterned dress is playing with a pink ball on a green lawn in front of the house. The sky is blue with some clouds, and a palm tree is visible in the background.

**Supple curves complement
harsh corners at the Playful House.
Bill Henson locates the *exotic
in the everyday*. And Melanie
Katsalidis lives a mix of
*jewellery, art and architecture.***

EVERYDAY DREAMING

Kitty Chou

There are artists for all times and ages, and Kitty Chou certainly represents the global world we inhabit. Based in Hong Kong, Chou travels widely and regularly, and the world as she experiences it is both her subject and studio. She carries her camera with her wherever she is and uses it to 'point and shoot' the environment and details of life as she happens upon them.

Her works are often described as painterly – from a distance, one is easily fooled into thinking they are lush oils on canvas. They've an ethereal quality, existing somewhere between reality and abstraction.

Chou relies on chance as the director of the image. What she sees (and shoots) is what she gets, and thanks to a combination of discipline, experience and intuition, she achieves some astounding results. Her handling of the image in the post-production process is minimal and sensitive. Very little is changed, and yet it can be difficult to tie the images back to the real world.

The work illustrated, *Red & Pink #1* (2016), is like a blurry abstraction, reminiscent of soft silk fabrics, thickly laid oil paint, or frosting on a cake. What is captured is a moment in time: an instant when colour, form, light and natural elements converge to

create a sumptuous visual experience – one you want to dive into and consume all at once.

We are often intrigued by transformation: think of that moment seeing your reflection in a funhouse mirror, when you experience yourself as someone – or something – else, in real time. Transformation through water is just as fascinating. How an object changes size in a swimming pool or the stems of flowers enlarge in a glass vase. In the images of Kitty Chou, the transformation is extreme and other-worldly. A pile of refuse becomes an abstract painting, neon lights become holes in the ground, water becomes solid.

The brilliance of Chou's work is in revealing the poetry present within seemingly unremarkable urban environments. By honing in on details of colour, reflection and refraction, Chou shows us that the world is more exciting and strange than we realise. Through her eyes, details of walls, buildings, pavements and light on water take on striking geometry, rich contrasting colour and sparkling luminosity. – Mark Hughes

Kitty Chou is represented by Ben Brown Gallery, Hong Kong



YOUR DISCO NEEDS YOU

Chen Wei

Fact and fiction collide in the captivating images of Chen Wei, a Chinese photographer known for his depictions of worlds that are not what they seem.

In The Wave #4 (2013) represents both a shared and singular experience. The setting is a nightclub; a smoke machine thickens the air and a soft purple light captures bodies and faces lost in the trance of music. Bodies channel heavy beats and high-pitched frequencies, expressed through hand movements reaching into the air and backlit by stage lights. The experience is shared – the same sound is heard by all on the dancefloor – but Chen Wei suggests a disconnect across the room. There is too much space between dancers, and they all gaze in different directions. The dancefloor can confer anonymity, providing an opportunity to let go, and to enter an internal world that is not usually accessible. This image gives a sense of those introspective journeys.

As a young Chinese artist living and working in his home country, Wei's work raises a number of questions. How does a young Chinese artist depict the complexities of their society? What medium can they work through

to develop a unique language that is universally understood? How obvious can the "message" be? These questions often confront us when trying to decipher the layers of meaning in Chinese contemporary art.

When you settle in to enjoy a photograph by Wei, it is easy to assume he has opened the door to a recognisable world and an accessible language. However, all is not what it seems. All of Chen Wei's photographs – even those that seem to depict real urban decay, authentic youth culture or happened-upon scenarios – are in fact elaborately staged, down to the last detail. Though this fabrication of worlds and an apparent lack of "truth" may impact upon our emotional connection to the work, the artist – like a good filmmaker – keeps us engaged through the carefully-considered architecture of his sets and the relatable experiences he reproduces. Chen Wei tends to raise more questions than he provides answers for, but the layers of symbols and complex narratives he embeds in his images allow us to forge our own conclusions. – Mark Hughes

Chen Wei is represented by Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai.

