

# Michael Wolf

Through shrewd visual observations, Michael Wolf (b. 1954, Germany) reveals the character and creativity of Hong Kong's inhabitants and the unlikely art that dwells in the city's back streets.



Having lived in Hong Kong since 1995, Michael Wolf has walked the city's streets for many years, using photography to document "the way things are". Starting his career as a photojournalist, it comes as no surprise that his artistic curiosity and practice is infused not only with a sense of responsibility but also with an understanding of the importance of photographic legacy and visual chronicling. "Much of what we know about Paris at the turn of the last century is based on Eugene Atget's work and without Bernd and Hilla Becher we would not have such an extensive record of industrial architecture. I am trying to do the same for Hong Kong – document its unique characteristics so there is a record for future generations."

"If one looks at the various topics I have focused on in the past 13 years, a common thread is usually the concept of juxtaposition. In the *Real*

*Toy Story* installation, I juxtaposed collected used toys with portraits of toy factory workers; in *The Transparent City*, I juxtaposed cityscapes with tiny details seen in the myriad of windows; and with *Architecture of Density* I came up with the idea to juxtapose the gargantuan high rises with details observed in the back alleys behind the buildings, combining the macro and the micro. I always like a project to have several layers, it makes the work more complex and stimulates thought." The juxtaposition that takes place in *Informal Arrangements*, which is an ongoing project that started in 2003, is not only contained within the images themselves, but also in the way that they are presented. Short films of the same subject, entitled *30 Second Photographs*, are shown alongside the photographs as well as the found objects that they both feature. "I see my new work as being more of an installation, combining

vernacular objects, short films and photographs."

In this new work, Wolf delves deeper into Hong Kong's back alleys and quiet streets. Here, he shines a light on the city's myriad vernacular sculptures and idiosyncratic assemblages "in a way that reveals much of the resilience and ingenuity of the city's residents". While direct human portrayal rarely occurs in this work, there are compelling traces of the human throughout the series. It captures man-made arrangements reminiscent of Dada ready-mades and found objects, or *objets trouvés*, as conceptualised by Marcel Duchamp in the early 20th century. "I realised very early in my career, primarily through studying the work of Walker Evans, that objects can reveal a great deal about the identity of the inhabitants of a city. I see myself as an urban anthropologist."



1 *Untitled*, from the series *Informal Solutions*, 2016 © Michael Wolf / Galerie Wouter van Leeuwen  
2 *Untitled*, from the series *Informal Solutions*, 2016 © Michael Wolf / Galerie Wouter van Leeuwen