

In their own words:

Kurt Tong

*This Q&A was produced alongside the exhibition *The Queen, The Chairmand and I*, shown at Impressions Gallery from 16 December 2016 to 18 March 2017.*

IG: Which artists/photographers do you particularly respect?

I really got into the work of Alec Soth when I was studying for my MA, me and 80% of the photography student population! However, 10 years later, I still have a lot of respect for him as his work continues to evolve despite being so commercially successful. It was easy for him to stand still and reap the benefits but he continues to bring out new and innovative work.

I am also a big fan of Alfredo Jaar, James Turrell, Celeste Boursier Mougeno and Rirkrit Tiravanija. I try to take inspiration from artists working across different mediums.

IG: Why do you choose photography as your artistic medium?

I started my artistic career as a documentary photographer but I prefer to work across different mediums now, whichever suits my concept the best. However, lots of my recent work is still grounded in photography. I like the fact that photography is always rooted in reality and it's a medium that most viewers are already familiar with. So I am already half way there when communicating with the viewers.

IG: Why did you choose to do this project? What was the trigger?

I grew up between three cultures of Mainland China, the British Colony Hong Kong and Britain. After the birth of my daughter, knowing that I will be the one responsible to educate her about her Chinese heritage, I realised that I didn't know myself very well,

or indeed where I came from and where I belonged. So I decided to spend sometime researching into my roots and learn about my ancestors. That was the trigger that led to this project. What was meant to be a six months project, ended up taking nearly three years.

IG: What are your main influences and how have they influenced your work?

My biggest influences my family. My wife and my three daughters! They make me grounded and realise what's important in life. (They also take up so much of my time, it gets me to work much harder when I do have time to actually work on my art!)

IG: Some of our visitors will be interested in the technical aspects of your project. What equipment did you use? And did it affect the way that you worked and the project outcome?

The colour images were taken on a 5x4 large format camera on colour negatives. I chose to use this camera as it slows me right down so I spend time to consider each image that I take.

IG: What plans do you have for future projects?

Since completing this project. I made a series of sculptural and installation based work called *Echoed Visions*, looking at photography, through non-photographic mediums.

Then I moved onto a project called *Sweet Water, Bitter Earth. The Queen, The Chairman and I* allowed me to get to know my ancestors and learn to related to being Chinese on a cultural and human level. *Sweet Water, Bitter Earth* was my project to see whether I have a connection with China, the country itself.

I recently exhibited as yet unfinished project called '*Threads of Sisterhood*', it looks at the life of my nanny, who represent the last of a tribe of early Chinese feminists called the comb up women. She featured briefly in *The Queen, The Chairman and I* and I wanted to expand her story.

IG: Do you have any recommended reading to further contextualise your work?

Instead of reading further to contextualise this project. It is my hope that the project can inspire the viewers to explore their own family history. Given the year we have had

in 2016, where stereotypes, fears and hatred have crept into our daily lives. Where millions of people are seen as a singular entity, given a label and a threat to our society. I hope people will learn about their own past, learn about the choices and scarifies our ancestors have had to make. In doing so, get us thinking on a human level again, to focus about individuals and how amazing we all can be.