

Michael Wolf Photography
4 November 2010 – 4 Januari 2010

Michael Wolf

(German/ American, 1954 -)

Photographer Michael Wolf has lived in Hong Kong since 1995. Accordingly, he is best known for his complex and formal study (Architecture of Density) of the organic interaction between new modern industrial and traditional identities in China – as expressed through the urban structures and architecture – or what he calls the “organic metropolis”. In a similar manner, Wolf turns the lens to Western culture and identity. In *Transparent City* (shot in Chicago) he maintains a distant approach through architecture and observes the lives of people within it. The subjects can be seen clearly through the building windows, and the viewer takes on the role, popular in today’s media society, of a spying eye. Consequently, in *Paris Street View*, Wolf removes the walls of the buildings, but maintains the same distance as if he were spying through a window or looking through a secret lens. Also here, Wolf makes a series of important remarks on today’s socio-cultural community. The age of social control wherein neighbors would spy on each other and denounce wrongdoers in the church is over. Today’s secular society has transformed the streets into the church – and the omnipresent eye of big brother is everywhere. The entire society has become as encapsulating and enclosed as the buildings which Wolf photographs in his previous series: *Architecture of Density* and *Transparent City*. He proves this in *Paris Street View* by showing how we cannot any longer escape the gaze of the spying camera, satellite, computer chip, in which we – our image and our information - are captured; and we remain guilty until proven innocent. In as much, the structural visual pattern of espionage in Wolf’s *Paris Street View* shows how that innocence, the innocence of freedom, is stolen by an omnipresence of cameras around us; A stolen kiss, flipping the bird in a traffic jam, taking an extra long cigarette break, a moment of despair – nothing is left to obscurity or mystery, everything is double checked.

But there are other aspects of Wolf's new work which require mentioning. Wolf importantly accesses, through the large format, highly pixilated photographs of Google street view photographs, a totally new way of seeing Paris – possibly the most recognizable city in photography due to the likes of Cartier-Bresson, Doisneau and Atget. He hereby acclimates the traditional Parisian imago to a contemporary gaze, revealing a new identity, and confronts us with the definitions of meaning and non-meaning, value and non-value. Wolf's Anthropological work thus attains a new level of representation and symbolism.