

FIFTY ONE

CHEUNG CHAU SUNRISES

Michael Wolf

16/05/2024 - 13/07/2024

Opening:

Thursday May 16th, 12-9 pm

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Michael Wolf
Cheung Chau Sunrises



Opening: Thursday, May 16th 2024, from 12 to 9 pm
Show: Friday, May 17th - July 13th 2024

Gallery FIFTY ONE is delighted to present a new exhibition of never-before-shown works at the gallery of artist Michael Wolf (1954-2019). This exhibition features a selection of Wolf's series of sunrises, captured in the early morning from the rooftop of his home overlooking the coast of Cheung Chau in Hong Kong.

Michael Wolf was born in 1954 in Munich and grew up in Canada, Germany, and the United States. He studied fine arts at the University of California, Berkeley, and visual communication with Otto Steinert at the Folkwang School in Essen, Germany. Later, he worked as an editorial photographer for German magazines such as GEO, Time, Spiegel, and Stern, but his desire for a more personal artistic vision led him to Hong Kong, where he found his artistic voice and left his career as an editorial photographer behind.

Wolf drew inspiration from the constantly transforming mega-cities. From the architecture of the tower blocks in Hong Kong and Chicago to the relentless bustle of Tokyo's metro, from privacy to voyeurism to the phenomenon of mass production of modern art, Wolf documented in each of his series a new perspective on urban life. His camera observed the urban structures, as well as the ways in which people adapt and reconfigure the urban landscape.

After living and working in Hong Kong for many years, Wolf left the city for a new home on Cheung Chau Island. Between 2017 and 2018, he captured numerous photos of sunrises between 5:30 a.m. and 7:30 a.m., overlooking one of Hong Kong's many bays. The fleeting play of light and color, like a natural spectacle, differs markedly with his earlier work on Hong Kong. In those pieces, he emphasized the social critiques reflecting living conditions in overcrowded megacities and the associated issues of mass consumption and environmental pollution.

The images of the sun, the clouds, and the expanse of the sky and sea, divided by a horizon, offer a moment of stillness and reflection. They reveal the natural rhythm of sight and stand in stark contrast to the chaotic rhythm of life for the labourers in Hong Kong's capitalist port. Nature remains a constant in the human condition.

In the context of Wolf's socially critical body of work, the images of 'Cheung Chau Sunrises' can also be understood as a representation of freedom. The serene beauty of these sunrises raises questions about the role of humans in the natural world, but also about the originality, aura, and autonomy of photography in times of apparent digital randomness. The series invites the viewer to slow down and enjoy the enchanting unspoiled nature that Michael Wolf so masterfully captured.

Wolf's work is held in many permanent collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Brooklyn Museum, the San Jose Museum of Art in California, the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago, Museum Folkwang in Essen, and the German Museum of Architecture in Frankfurt. Additionally, he twice won first prize in the World Press Photo Award competition (2005 & 2010) and received an honorable mention (2011). He was also nominated for the Prix Pictet photography prize in 2010 and 2017. He published more than 30 photobooks, and some of these books, such as 'Tokyo Compression' and 'Architecture of Density', have become bestselling classics in the canon of recent photobooks history.

We are looking forward to welcoming you at the exhibition to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the gallery and to pay homage to Michael Wolf.