



Exhibition Dates
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Acknowledgements
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Tammy Wong, Exhibition Co-ordinator, Customs House
Vivien Sung, Graphic Design

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China Dreaming ★★★

An exhibition of photographs by OLIVIA MARTIN-McGUIRE

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A three-month artist-in-residency in Shanghai first fuelled my appetite for China. I had never travelled anywhere that felt so much like ‘history in the making’.

A new world was emerging. Everywhere you looked, buildings were on the rise - the city transforming around me. And with this unregulated landscape, came the sense that anything was possible. It was the perfect playground for the daring entrepreneur. The belly of the country itself seemed to rumble.

Ten months later, I was invited back, this time to take part in the Lianzhou International Photo Festival in the country’s south, followed by a trip north to Beijing. The following year saw a return to Shanghai for an exhibition at Eastlink Gallery.

Each of my visits opened up new and surprising aspects of this extraordinary country, yet there was always the same underground force, the same level of excitement permeating the small or large cities.

China Dreaming is a body of work captured over that three-year period. As a whole, the exhibition reflects the awakening and blossoming of a country coming of age.

It is the merge of two distinct series of works, that for me, best highlight the intoxicating combination of a hidden history, a high-powered future and the indefinite reality of the present.

It is the notion of what ‘being present’ actually means in China that became the trigger-point for the two collections.

Waking Dream States is the primary series (exhibited in the light boxes) taking these ideas to a deeper, conceptual level. It began in the south where with the help of a translator, I approached individuals on the street and asked them to go “somewhere else” – to the future or the past, anywhere but the present.

Consequently, the photographs document ordinary people paused in their activity, seemingly asleep, but actually “escaping”. They have, as it were, left their bodies to be in the imaginary. The bodies are now shells, their “presence” is individual – each in “their own” world.

It seemed an intriguing place to explore notions of memory, fantasy and individuality in a climate where a new market culture seemed so often to intensify or challenge these very human concepts.

The supporting series was taken during the same period. It is a street-based documentation of China Dreaming - reflecting the transitional and temporary nature of both the population and geography.

Together these two collections represent both Middle Kingdoms, through my eyes.

Where do you spend most of your time? If you close *your* eyes, where are you now?

Olivia Martin-Macguire is a Sydney based photographer.

