

KWAN SHEUNG CHI

關尚智

Right: *In Defence of Kwan Sheung Chi* by Kwan Sheung Chi, Installation view, video, 8 min 40 sec, 2023.
Courtesy the artist and Kiang Malingue. Photo: John Batten.



Their artwork crosses the boundaries of conceptual, political and social enquiry. Significantly, their careers have coincided with Hong Kong's recent decades of social unrest and political changes.

Inside Kiang Malingue gallery's raw industrial unit in Tin Wan, near Aberdeen, three rooms have been constructed to house Kwan Sheung Chi's *Not Retrospective* exhibition. In the first room, a conventional gallery space exhibits small mixed-media objects, photographs and videos dating from 2003. Adjacent, replicating a darkened interview or interrogation room with table and chairs, four newly produced videos play on a continuous loop. The third room, completely bare, larger, fully curtained and formal, has a front-facing lectern. Hand-made from cardboard, the lectern hangs by wires, hovering from the ceiling. It is a studio in which one of Kwan's videos has been made, and a sacrosanct space where official speeches are delivered.

Each room has an intentional interconnection as well as an individual ambience relating to its artwork. These holistic details are a hallmark of the thoughtful Kwan, one of a productive generation of Hong Kong artists that includes his wife Wong Wai Yin, who features as an actor in his videos. Their artwork crosses the boundaries of conceptual, political and social enquiry. Significantly, their careers have coincided with Hong Kong's recent decades of social unrest and political changes.

Kwan's work in the first part of the show includes witty conceptual pieces, an example being *Correction pen corrected with its own content* (2023/2012), a container covered in layers of its own correction fluid. More relevant are his repetitive artist performances of 2003 that link with his new videos. In a series of exhibited school exercise books, Kwan has repeatedly handwritten "I am Artist" in English or Chinese, line by line, page by page. He fills these notebooks as if it were a punishment or he were practising calligraphy. The repetitive language is also forcing him to be an

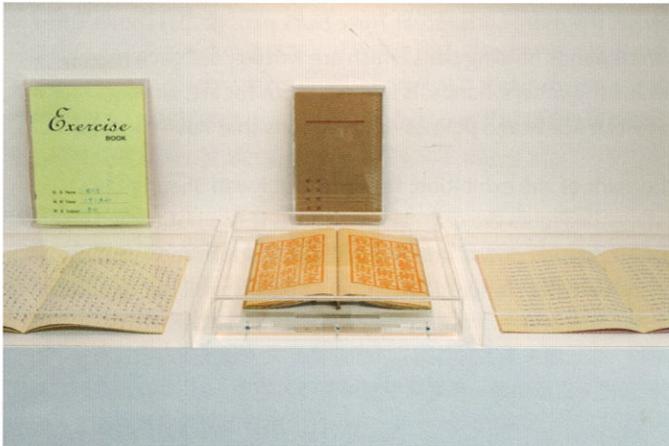
artist: like the conditioning effected by the chanting of a Buddhist sutra, repeated Christian prayer, advertising and political propaganda.

Kwan has internalised an early personal hope to be an artist, but this early work foreshadows his continuing interest in manipulative power that can change human behaviour, the main focus of his new videos. To effectively convey his message, he uses hyperbole, parody and satire, with his entire exhibition having an absurdist theatrical atmosphere concerning what is and what is not real, a world of double-speak. That ambience is established early, beginning with the exhibition title, *Not Retrospective*. This is immediately seen to be false; the show's first room is pure retrospective: it's all older work.

The power of stated language and its ability to manipulate is demonstrated as the audience leaves the first room into the second; they see a video of the artist writing "I Will Not Make Any Political Art. I Did Not Make Any Political Art", a phrase that is repeated in another video in the second room. Are we seeing a self-criticism being written, as was often forced during the Cultural Revolution? Or is stating this phrase, like a slogan or a piece of public relations, trying to persuade the viewer that this artist is not political?

In Defence of Kwan Sheung Chi (2023) is the most confronting video in the exhibition. Standing at the actual lectern seen in the third room, Wong Wai Yin plays the role of a stern female government official giving a lecture in Mandarin to an (unseen) audience. She berates critics of the artist, telling us that "...Hong Kong artist Kwan Sheung-chi's creations represent our country's artistic standard, and his efforts and dedication should be respected and appreciated. Any indiscriminate criticisms and attempts to suppress him are doomed

他們的藝術劃破了探討概念、政治和社會的界線。而且夫婦倆的事業與香港近數十年來的社會動亂和政治改變千絲萬縷。



Kwan Sheung Chi, Installation view of *Not retrospective* at Kiang Malingue. Courtesy the artist and Kiang Malingue. Photo: Samson Wong Pak Hang.

馬凌畫廊位於香港仔附近的田灣，這個保留了原生態的工業單位，為了舉辦關尚智「Not Retrospective」展覽，特別把展場佈置成三間房。第一間房是傳統的美術館空間，展品都是由2003年開始創作，包括較小型的混合媒體物件、照片和錄像。相鄰的昏暗房間放置了桌椅，就如接見或問話室一樣，裡面重覆播放四部全新製作的錄像。第三個房間面積較大，感覺正規而且以牆簾佈置，房間只放著向前的講台。講台以卡紙人手製作，以鋼線從天花吊，在空中盤旋。這是關氏攝製其中一部錄像作品的片廠，塑造造成神聖不可侵犯，用來發表官方演說的空間。

每一間房都有意營造出彼此之間的關連，同時富有配合展出藝術品的個性。顧全全局細節正是關氏的一貫特徵。關氏屬於香港多產藝術家的一代，同代人還有關太黃慧妍，她也在關尚智的錄像中粉墨登場。兩人的藝術劃破了探討概念、政治和社會的界線。而且夫婦倆的事業與香港近數十年來的社會動亂和政治改變千絲萬縷。

展覽首部份展出的關氏作品包括一些妙趣橫生的概念作品。《被自身的內容修正的修正筆》（2023/2012年），是一支塗滿了修正液的修正液。而當中與關氏錄像關聯的，還有一些2003年他不斷重覆的藝術表演。其中，關氏在一系列學生習作簿中不斷以中文或英文手逐行逐頁填滿了「我是藝術家」。這些手寫字既像罰抄功課，也像書法練習。不斷重覆的字詞，有如頌唸佛經、基督教禱文又或廣告與政治文宣一樣，產生了條件作用，迫使關氏成為藝術家。

關氏內化了早年希望成為藝術家的理想，但這件早期作品也預示了他的藝術興趣，就是探討可改變人類行為的操縱力量，而這正是新製作錄像的焦點。為有效帶出相關訊息，他利用了誇張、戲謔和諷刺的手法，在整個展覽中營造出荒誕的戲劇感，呈現一個真真假假、雙言巧語的世界。展覽以「不是回顧展」為題，從命題便確立了這種氣氛：明明第一個空間正在回顧關氏的舊作，正正與命題相反。

In the video's supposed defence of Kwan and his art, it mocks an autocratic government's insistence on dictating what is right and what is wrong and intolerance of opposing opinions, through an artist's licence to use exaggeration and satire.

to failure...", and such doublespeak as, "...These people have taken the opportunity to create double standards, turning black and white upside down, slandering and smearing him, and attempting to deprive him of his freedom of artistic freedom..."

It is a wonderful parody, in the manner of Charlie Chaplin's famous monologue imitating a Hitler-like dictator in *The Great Dictator* (1940). In the video's supposed defence of Kwan and his art, it mocks an autocratic government's insistence on dictating what is right and what is wrong and intolerance of opposing opinions, through an artist's licence to use exaggeration and satire.

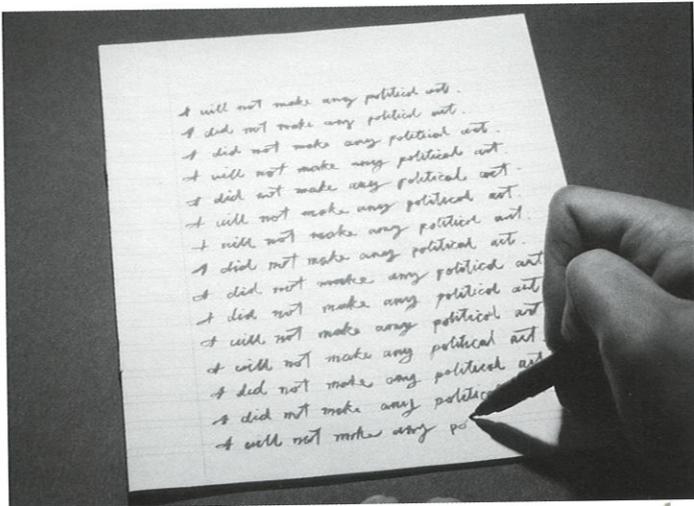
Like all good artists, Kwan digs for a reaction from his audience and he doubles down in the video *Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated* (2023). Using actual dialogue from the *Star Trek* television series and movies, Kwan constructs a warning video to humans projected in stark, large, black and white text and spoken using voiced AI software: "...Strength is irrelevant. We have analysed your defensive capabilities as being unable to withstand us. Death is irrelevant. We do not accept failure; we do not tolerate resistance. If you defend yourselves, you will be punished..." It is a chilling statement of might over right: iconoclasm in words.

Handover (2023), a title referencing Hong Kong's return to China in 1997, depicts a piece of ice in the shape of a drinking glass which is literally passed between three video screens by three pairs of hands: Kwan, Wong and their son. Their handling of the increasingly shrinking frozen glass reflects the double-meaning of its title, and perhaps the shrinking of identity and open political space.

Likewise, the more conceptual *Three black pens* (2023) shows three different hands holding pens which are writing, but each merely blackens the others' hands. Is it a metaphor for art, writing, creativity, society and politics – and actions that have consequences?

In the spirit of the exhibition: I believe that Kwan Sheung Chi's artistic endeavours are calm and creative. He has not turned "black and white upside down" and "his artistic creations represent our country's artistic standard." Arguments against will not be tolerated!

錄像施展了藝術家特權，誇張諷刺地「保衛」關尚智和他的藝術，嘲笑專制政府堅持何謂對錯一錘定音，而且毫不容忍反對意見。



I Will Not Make Any Political Art. I Did Not Make Any Political Art by Kwan Sheung Chi, Installation view, video, 9 min 24 sec, 2020. Courtesy the artist and Kiang Malingue. Photo: John Batten.

觀眾離開第一個房間進入第二個房間時，可以親身感受陳述語言的力量和操縱能力。關氏在錄像中書寫著：「我不會做任何政治藝術。我過去也沒有做過政治藝術」。同一句在第二個房間內的另一段錄像中也不斷重覆。我們看到的，是否如同文化大革命期間般的悔過書？抑或，重覆這句說話是口號或公關宣傳，試圖說服觀眾這位藝術家不涉政治？

《保衛關尚智》（2023年）是展覽中最發人深思的錄像。黃慧妍站在第三間房的講台前，扮演著政府女官員，嚴厲地以普通話向片中未有現身的觀眾發表演講。她斥責其他人批評關氏，並指出：「香港藝術家關尚智的作品代表了國家的藝術水平，他的努力和奉獻精神理應獲得尊重和讚賞。任何不分青紅皂白的批評，又或壓制他的企圖都註定要失敗……」。同類的雙言巧語還有：「……這些人趁機製造雙重標準，顛倒黑白，對他誹謗抹黑，企圖剝奪他的藝術自由……」

這是妙不可言的戲仿，令人想起差利卓別靈在《大獨裁者》（1940年）中模仿希特拉的獨裁者口吻獨白。錄像施展了藝術家特權，誇張諷刺地「保衛」關尚智和他的藝術，嘲笑專制政府堅持何謂對錯一錘定音，而且毫不容忍反對意見。

關氏和眾多優秀的藝術家一樣，竭力牽動觀眾反應，更在《抵抗是徒勞的。你會被同化。》（2023年）錄像作品中把力度加倍。他以《星空奇遇記》電視劇和電影中的真實對白，構建出向人類發出警告的短片，以鮮明的黑白大字投射，並使用人工智能生成語音軟件說出：「……力量無關重要。我們已分析了你們的防禦能力，知道你們無法還擊。死亡無關重要。我們不接受失敗、不容忍抵抗。保衛自己將受到懲罰……」這段宣言以強權蓋過人權，以文字宣揚反傳統信仰，令人不寒而慄。

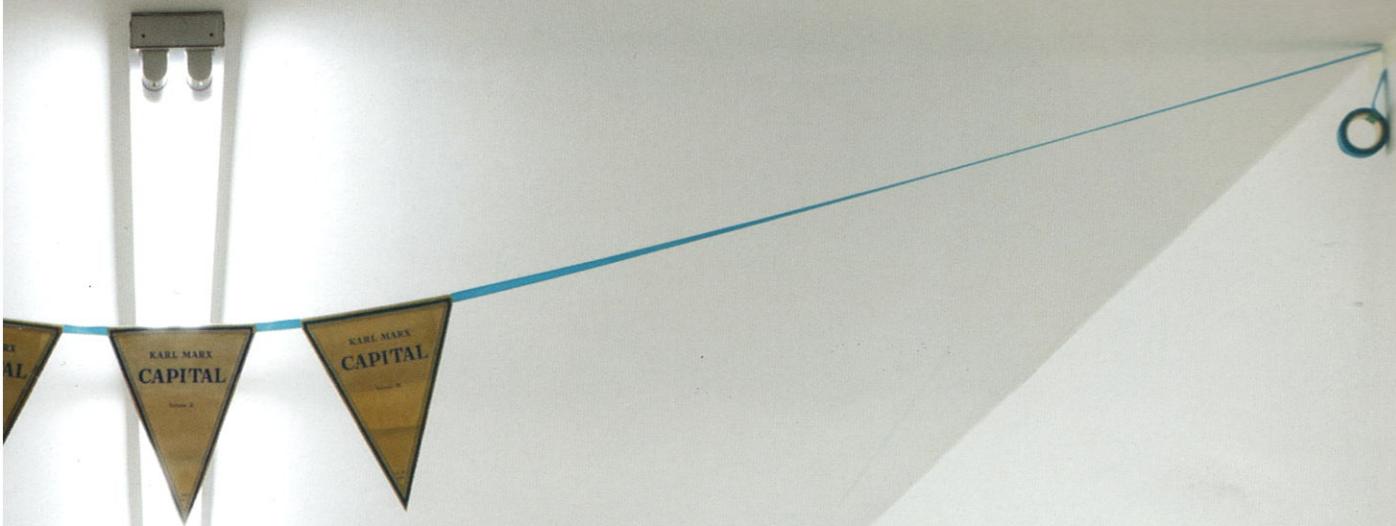
《移交》（2023年）令人想起香港於1997年回歸中國，作品中的冰雕酒杯在三個屏幕之間經過關尚智、黃慧妍和兩人兒子的三隻手移交。冰雕酒杯在交接過程中不斷縮小，反映出命題的雙言巧語，又或暗喻個人身份認同和開放政治空間也在縮小。

同樣地，更概念化的《三支黑筆》（2023年）顯示出三隻不同的手捉著正在「書寫」的筆，但其實每一支筆都只是在塗黑另一個人的手。這是否在暗喻藝術、寫作、創意、社會和政治，以及上述行動均有後果？

秉承展覽的精神，我相信關尚智的藝術創作都是冷靜而富有創造力的。他沒有「顛倒黑白」，而且「他的藝術創作代表了國家的藝術水平」。我們絕對不可以容忍反對的聲音！



Kwan Sheung Chi, Installation view of *Not retrospective* at Kiang Malingue. Courtesy the artist and Kiang Malingue. Photo: Samson Wong Pak Hang.





我们注意到最近一些针对
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against the artistic creation
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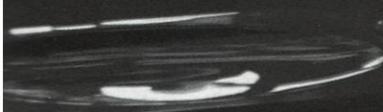
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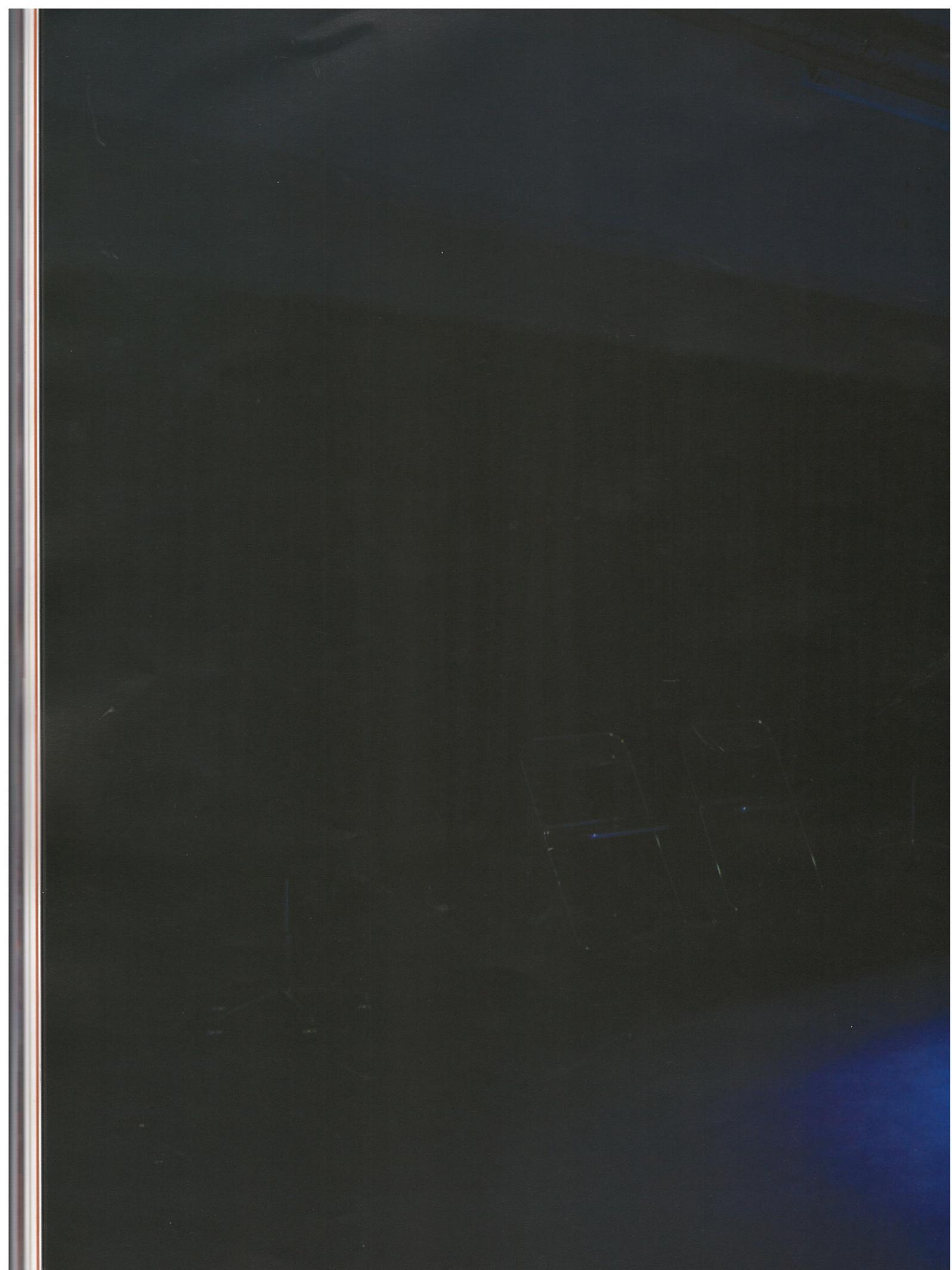
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