

## Tseng Kwong Chi Bibliography

### Introduction

The son of exiled Chinese nationalists, Tseng Kwong Chi (1950-90) produced a large body of intelligent, dynamic, performance-based photography that captured both the pivotal downtown Manhattan art scene of the 1980s and reflected on the world's increasing globalization. Born in the British colony of Hong Kong in 1950, Tseng Kwong Chi immigrated with his family, who fled Communist China years earlier, to Vancouver, Canada at age 16. He briefly attended the University of British Columbia prior to leaving for Paris' prestigious Académie Julian in 1974. After receiving formal photography training abroad, Tseng moved to New York in 1978 and began crafting the performative self-portraits that form the backbone of his artistic practice.

During his career in New York, Tseng traveled extensively and his constant movement greatly impacted his work as a commercial photographer. In his landmark "East Meets West" series, which he began in 1979—and which evolved into "The Expeditionary Series"—Tseng adopted the identity of a visiting Chinese official, wearing a deadpan expression and a "Mao suit." Describing himself as both an "ambiguous ambassador" and an "inquisitive traveler," he assumed the role of a dedicated tourist crisscrossing the globe, always an outsider in a foreign land. As a Hong-Kong born, Paris-trained artist living in New York City, Tseng viewed himself as a citizen of the world and eschewed labeling himself or his art as "Chinese." Simultaneously mindful of his art historical predecessors and vastly ahead of his time, Tseng photographed "selfies," in front of tourist destinations and in natural settings, far before the action even had a name. Though Tseng is, of course, present in his self-portraits, he appears as somewhat of an enigma, directing the viewer's focus on the complexities embedded in his backdrops. Tseng's photographs not only satirized relations between the United States and its emerging rival, China, but also broadcasted his freedom of movement, as the artist was determined to find and identify what was quintessentially American.

In fact, Tseng is perhaps most well-known for his ability to maneuver between identities, political and social, insinuating himself with equal poise in nightclubs and in the presence of national landmarks. He was an eager and reliable witness to his time, documenting not only his friend Keith Haring's subway drawings but also New York's lively art and nightclub scenes of the 1980s. Like his dear friend Haring, Tseng became known as an activist for his ability to capture the nation's political temperature through his art. Yet, Tseng, above all, was a performer. With the unique skill of performing specifically for the camera, his photography provides a permanent record of all his creative endeavors. In fact, during his brief but prolific 10-year career, he created over 100,000 vibrant color and black-and-white photographs of his contemporaries and provided a rich historical archive of the decade. In 1990, Tseng died at age 39 from complications related to the AIDS virus, leaving an enduring body of work, whose complexity is belied by its humor and grace.

### Sources

**Brandt, Amy L. *Tseng Kwong Chi: Performing for the Camera / Amy Brandt ; with Contributions by Alexandra Chang [and 3 Others]*. edited by Kwong Chi Tseng, Gallery Grey Art, Museum Chrysler, Gallery Tufts University. Art and Art Mary and Leigh Block Museum of: Norfolk, Virginia : Chrysler Museum of Art, 2015. TR647 T74 P47**

Reproducing more than 100 works by Tseng from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, and including archival materials from his commissions for the Soho Weekly News. The book presents Tseng's best-known self-portrait series, "East Meets West," as well as lesser-known works, plus portraits of his friends Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kenny Scharf, among others. The text, and accompanying exhibition, is a dual effort by The Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, Virginia and New York University's Grey Art Gallery. Led by Amy Brandt, the Chrysler Museum's McKinnon Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, *Tseng Kwong Chi: Performing for the Camera* displays some seventy-five photographs and is accompanied by the first substantial monograph on the artist.

**Cameron, Dan. "Tseng Kwong Chi: Self Portraits 1979-1989." In *London: Ben Brown Fine Arts, 2008, 126: [Published by Gallery], 2008. On Order.***

Accompanying the Ben Brown Fine Arts exhibit, *Tseng Kwong Chi: Self Portraits 1979-1989*, this print collection features 100 works from the artist's pioneering series of large-scale black-and-white self-portraits, many of which have never been published.

**Chong, Ping, and Muna Tseng. "Slutforart." [In English]. *PAJ* 22, no. 1 (2000): 111-28. Downloaded**

Muna Tseng's stunning and moving visual dance-theater solo performance, on the life and work of her brother Tseng Kwong Chi. Discusses the artist's life in the East Village, his attitude towards being considered and Asian-American artist and the reasons he enjoyed photography, as well as his artistic process.

**Haring, Keith. *Keith Haring : Future Primeval*. edited by Galleries Illinois State University. University Normal, Ill. : New York: Normal, Ill. : University Galleries, Illinois State University ; New York : Abbeville Press, 1990. L741.973 H281Z.kei Oak Grove**

Aims to capture the spirit of Keith Haring's art, from his quick-draw graffiti art on black paper covering unsold advertising spaces in New York subways, to his large-scale canvases and murals. The book hopes to dismantle insensitive and inaccurate catch-phrases like "graffiti artist," "cartoonist," and "commercialist" and to solidify Haring's unique place in the pantheon of 20<sup>th</sup> century-art by highlighting his mission to create art that conveys the aspirations, traumas, desires and fears of people of any age or culture.

**Lippard, Lucy R. *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* [in English]. Pp. X+182. New Press | New York. On Order**

Weaves together cultural criticism, anthropology, and community activism to provide a critical look at how tourism sites are conceived and represented, and how they affect the places they transform. Explores the idea of one being a tourist in their own home, the ways in which advertising and photography define a place and the commodification of indigenous cultures. Lippard analyzes the political economies of leisure spaces, the tourist's fascination with tragic destinations, and how national parks and heritage sites define both nature and history.

**Molesworth, Helen Anne. "This Will Have Been: Art, Love, & Politics in the 1980s / Helen Molesworth; Essays by Johanna Burton [and Others] ; Contributions by Claire Grace [and Others]." In *Art, Love, & Politics in the 1980s*, edited by Johanna Burton, Claire Grace, Art Museum of Contemporary, Art Institute of Contemporary and Center Walker Art. Chicago, Ill. New Haven: Chicago, Ill. : Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago ; New Haven : In association with Yale Univ Press, 2012. 709.04 M719t**

Catalogue accompanying the exhibition that opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, conceived by Helen Molesworth. Structured through themes of sexuality, desire, democracy, and time, the framework provides grounding insight into an era of artistic production that is often considered to be unwieldy and excessive. Through an evenhanded contemplation of individual works, ranging from painting to media arts and performance, the catalogue presents art through the lens of 1970s feminism and within the tragedy and ignorance evident in the response to the rampage of AIDS.

**"Mug Shots." [In English]. *New Observations*, no. 124 (2000): 2-31. This issue on order**

Begun in the early Eighties, this artist-run periodical features a wide range of visual art, artists' projects, essays, poetry, and fiction; each issue is guest-edited and devoted to a specific cultural theme. "Mug Shots" is edited by Saul Ostrow and features contributions by Tina Barney, Patty Chang, Cody Choi, Tseng Kwong Chi, Renee Cox, Anne D'Alleva, Robin Adele Greeley, Lyle Ashton Harris, Amelia Jones, Nikki S. Lee, Yasumasa Morimura, Aura Rosenberg, Claude Simard, Laurie Simmons, Steven Spretznjak, Tony Tasset, Hannah Wilke and Neil Winokur.

**Rule, Amy, Nancy Solomon, and Leon Zimlich. "Original Sources: Art and Archives at the Center for Creative Photography / Edited by Amy Rule, Nancy Solomon; Research Assistance by Leon Zimlich." In *Art and Archives at the Center for Creative Photography*. Tucson, Ariz.]: Tucson, Ariz.: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, 2002. 779 O69 Oak Grove**

The Center for Creative Photography, located in Arizona, is home to one of the largest and most eclectic photographic collections in the world. This publication offers a virtual guided tour of the center's extensive holdings,

including a visit through the archives of some of the 20th century's most important North American photographers. The Center owns the most complete set of Tseng's print series "East Meets West" and had also acquired his posthumous twelve-print portfolio, "Costumes at the Met."

**Schueller, Malini Johar. "Locating Race: Global Sites of Post-Colonial Citizenship / Malini Johar Schueller." Albany: Albany: SUNY Press, 2009. 810.9895 S385I**

*Locating Race* is a powerful critique of the theories and fictions of globalization that privilege migration, transnationalism and flows. Malini Johar Schueller argues that in order to resist racism and imperialism in the United States, there must be a focus on local understanding of how different racial groups are specifically constructed and oppressed by the nation-state and imperial relations. The book is relevant to the study of Tseng Chwong Chi as it delves into the expunging of politics of location. The fifth chapter, *Claiming National Space and Postcolonial Critique: The Asian American Performances of Tseng Kwong Chi*, grapples with the cultural continuities of first- and second-generation Asian Americans through the specific lens of Tseng's photography.

**Tseng, Kwong Chi. *Ambiguous Ambassador / Tseng Kwong Chi*. Tucson: Tucson : Nazraeli Press, 2005. L779 T882Z**

A collection of works from Tseng Kwong Chi's "Expeditionary Series," this book pairs his iconic photographs with selected quotes by the artist. The book explores Tseng's role as an "Ambiguous Ambassador" as well as the ways in which his personal sentiment affected his photography.

**"Tseng, Kwong Chi - Profile - Artasiaamerica - a Digital Archive for Asian / Asian American <http://artasiaamerica.org/artist/detail/69>. Website**

Provides gallery of selected works as well as exhibition brochures for "Tseng Kwong Chi: A retrospective," Philadelphia Art Alliance, 2002.

**Ty, Eleanor Rose, and Donald C. Goellnicht. "Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen / Edited by Eleanor Ty and Donald C. Goellnicht." Bloomington: Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004. 810.9895 A8325**

A series of nine essays that investigate Asian North Americans subjects through a period of significant transformation. The authors explore the ways in which they move beyond the dichotomies the Old World and the New, the East and the West, to form new identities. The works demonstrates the individual feelings of those who are not part of a dominant white majority, drawing from wide range of sources, including novels, art, photography, poetry, cinema, theatre, and popular culture. Illustrating new ways of seeing and thinking, the essays move beyond national and diasporic models of ethnic identity.

## **Additional Sources to Consider**

### Monographs

**Haring, Keith, and Tseng Kwong Chi. *Art In Transit: Subway Drawings by Keith Haring*. New York: Harmony Books, 1984.**

### Other Publications

**Jacobs, Joseph. *This is Not a Photograph: Twenty Years of Large-Scale Photography, 1966-1986*. Sarasota, Fla.: John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art Foundation, 1987.**

**Machida, Margo. *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*. Exhibition catalogue. New York: Asia Society Galleries in association with New Press, 1994.**

### Film

Tseng, Muna, and Ping Chong. *SlutForArt, a.k.a. Ambiguous Ambassador*. Video recording of dance-theater work on the life and art of Tseng Kwong Chi, 75 min., 1999.