

**Changing Identity**  
**Investigating the transcendence of life in the strife-ridden world of pre/ post**  
**Lockdown**

“Sweet dreams are made of this  
Who am I to disagree?  
I travel the world and the seven seas  
Everybody is looking for something...”  
- Sweet Dreams (Are made of This)  
- Eurythmics -

Artist Choy Chun Wei delves into creating manifestations of our existence through his latest solo exhibition ‘Changing Identity’, and in doing so, leaves us with a bittersweet understanding of what shapes us to be who we are. Through ‘sculptures’, assemblage, collage and paintings, the artist takes us into his personal rabbit hole of a world on the brink of total dysfunction.

**What are your work processes, how did you progress from your last exhibition in 2021, ‘Encountering Mass Man’ to your latest exhibition, ‘Changing Identity’?**

Through the space I have, and also through teaching, I have the luxury of looking and reflecting on things, in particular questioning the engagement of materials, especially after ‘Encountering Mass Man’ - the materials and relationships with human behaviour, conditions and how we communicate and consequently, what happens to that ‘communication’. What has been mediated between us, what has changed? Life between that period has been transformed, disrupted, and probably it is a good time to really ponder and take time to look at identities within myself and their connection with others. ‘Changing Identity’ is a deeper reflection about ideas, the loss of emotions, about how much smart gadgets affect us, and about both slow and swift changes.

During MCO, and being an educator, I deal with students in a vastly changed way. This change is “forced”, neither teacher nor student had a choice, and it resulted in such deep impact for both parties. ‘Changing Identity’ is about that disruption in communication. There is a real sense of loss in terms of emotional well-being, and that loss of ‘touch’.

**What were conducting online classes like during MCO, from an educator’s point of view?**

I had to adapt. It is something I personally loathed, that ‘rushed’ factor, that physical distance. You see screens, students become “visuals”, and there is no totality. The interaction is almost alien-like, as everything became “objects”.

**Did you feel desensitised?**

I do, to an extent. I relish in being able to fully experience things, when I go to a site or handle materials. That richness was severely compressed when imposed with restrictions. It was frustrating. I had to teach drawing by drafting on glass. The whole experience took on a bizarre turn.

**Going back to ‘Changing Identity’, in terms of it being a continuation of ‘Encountering Mass Man’, what was your objective?**

I was very conscious about depicting the human form. Form is crucial, it is content. I’ve been drawing figures since College days, and subsequently forayed to collage,

abstraction, textures and symbolism. 'Encountering Mass Man' made me look at human forms via a pictographic way. After that, it was the desire to see that projecting out into space. Forms can be manipulated and become my portrayal of the human condition. If you look closely at some of the works, the packaging grids, the plastic which holds the objects - those patterns, to me, are lines of human heads, but it is only so when you perceive it as such.

I've always been interested in architecture, and a built environment contains repetitions and all that matrix. I see rhythm, which becomes us as urban dwellers. That became the basis to explain the changes in our environment. Look at our routines, our classrooms, the education system, how we categorise subjects - they all resemble a factory line manufacturing culture. I find it insightful.

I also wanted to discover how form can bring out certain qualities. It is about crystallising your vision in a larger manner. It is interesting to see collage, assemblage, casting, painting, drawing come to life. Collage is not just 'found' materials- it can be made. That was a fascinating element for me to integrate, and to see it as painterly sculptures or leaf textures.

That transferability is the real value.

**The totems in 'Changing Identity', what was the build up like in terms of configuration?**

Let's take 'Typographic Man' as an example - that Huawei merchandise-cut, the black and white contrasts, I just knew they could be fashioned into a torso. And now I need the head. I cast two magazine cutouts in resin. The title is self-explanatory. The work is made out of typography, languages which are fragmentary and imprinted. One of the reasons why I lean towards collage is because of that sense of 'physicality'.

**How do these totems translate unto your paintings?**

The paintings investigate the landscape itself, the contourings of figurines, and how that could be translated as the characters within the confines of these painted images. You can animate these surface textures as walking figures, they evolve just like humans do.

**'Changing Identity' is about evolving, of what happens to us in the long run. What are your thoughts?**

In the symbolic sense, everything we fear is becoming real. It is scary, and particularly terrifying when you have children. I keep thinking, "How do I switch this off? Can it be switched off?" What is sobering is I must be fully aware, at all times, of these rapid changes, and not allow them to be the defining narrative.

'Changing Identity' is not about the need to put a stop to what is inevitable, but rather, to seek a balance and to sharpen our skills of observation. More so, the works are a reminder - that palpable sense of disconnect must never be permitted to thrive and dominate.

In 'Changing Identity', Choy Chun Wei spurs a quickening of a myriad of thoughts, he implores us to question everything, and to intently listen. For Chun Wei, it is not sufficient to merely understand human reality, something must be done to accurately interpret and debate relevant conditions; that ultimately, we are not mere cogs in a big and soulless machine.

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