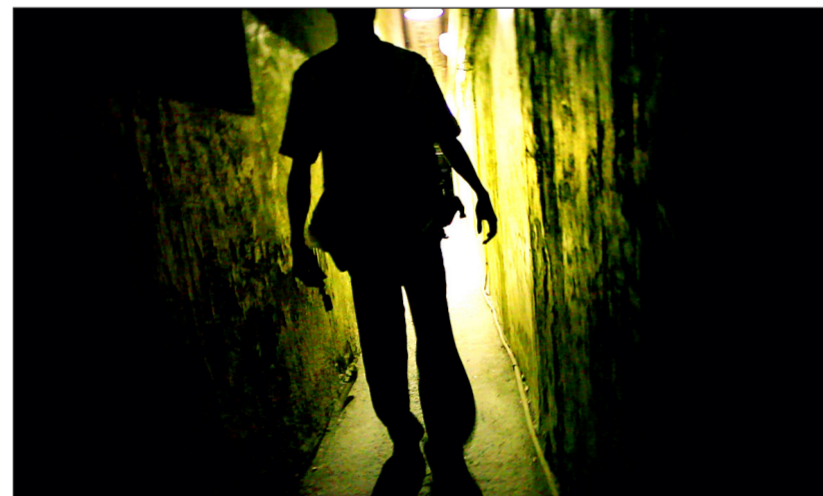
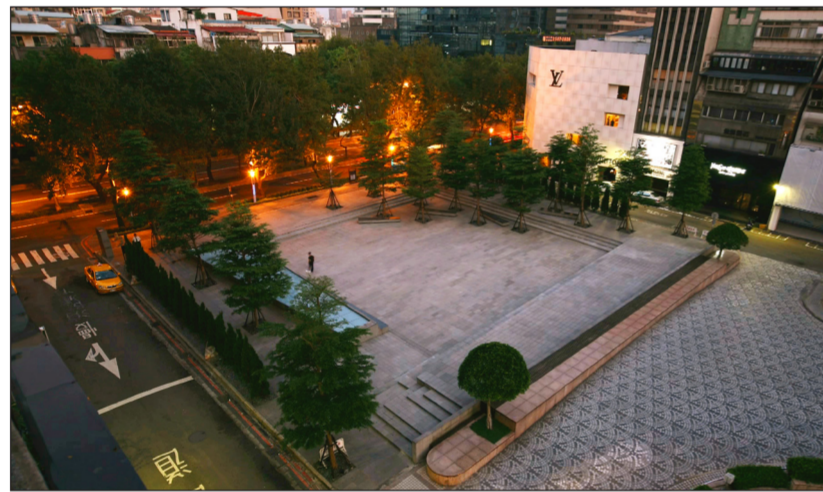


Is it up or is it down?



Looking Up! Looking Down! includes some interesting installations, but it mostly fails because of a lack of context

BY **NOAH BUCHAN**
STAFF REPORTER



Top: Lai Chih-sheng's *The Reverse Reality (Episode II)*.
Center: Lee Ji-hong's *20081029 Square*.

Above: Chou Wen-chin's *The Trialectics of a Stolen Bicycle: The Thief, the Police and I*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ESLITE GALLERY

It's the director's worst nightmare: the audience leaves halfway through a movie or play. But at Eslite Gallery, such behavior is encouraged.

For *Looking Up! Looking Down!* (抬頭一看·生活裡沒有任何美好的事), the gallery's current exhibition, there is no seating for six out of seven video installations on display, even though there are plenty of benches in a reception room.

"Nobody ever watches [the videos] all the way through," said Jenning King (金振寧), the gallery's public relations manager.

Herein lies a problem that afflicts many contemporary conceptual art shows — and their viewers — and one that *Looking Up!*, a collection of video, photographic and sculptural installations by 11 artists, also suffers from: the content is abstruse because of a lack of context concerning how the work was made or what it is about. Gallery literature tends to focus, rather, on the artists' ages and educational backgrounds, and uses jargon and pretentious diction to give relatively straightforward concepts an added air of sophistication.

Which is unfortunate because there is considerable talent on display here, in the form of imaginative and thought-provoking work that deserves mention.

This is particularly true of Chou Wen-chin's (周文欽) *The Trialectics of a Stolen Bicycle: The Thief, the Police and I* (單車失竊記之各有處境篇). This 17-minute video opens with grainy closed-circuit images of a thief smashing the artist's car window and making off with his bike. It then segues to an old black-and-white movie of a man attempting to enlist the help of police officers who respond apathetically to his entreaties — a scene King said replicates almost verbatim Chou's own experience at a Taipei police station.

Kao Jun-honn (高俊宏) employs music videos from MTV and YouTube as well as colonial architecture in *Loser's Grand Narrative* (失敗者大敘事) to explore cultural transformation. The three-segment video begins with Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, which, after running for roughly a minute, is replaced by a performer from India imitating the recently deceased entertainer's moves. The third segment shows a student comically imitating the Indian dancer. Viewed as a whole, the video reveals that although the imitators might not possess Jackson's phenomenal talents, they still manage to create something of their own that is both fresh and humorous.

Kao's plywood installation positioned directly across from the video mixes three colonial architectural styles common to Taiwan and other Southeast Asian countries. The structure appears to be unfinished, possibly a reference to Taiwan's unfinished project of creating its own cultural identity. As with the riffs on Jackson's dancing, the plywood installation shows how influences from one culture are appropriated by another to make something new.

Yeh Chen-yu (葉振宇) used detritus found along Tamsui River to build and furnish a shelter on the riverside, which he filmed in *Go Home After Ebbing* (潮退了·我們就回家). When the water rises inside the shack, the furniture floats around; as it recedes the interior is rearranged, a reference to the arbitrary nature of life.

The three videos listed above deploy concise and seamlessly edited visual narratives to investigate a theme — whether the insouciance of authorities, cultural identity or unpredictability.

But Chiu Shueh-meng's (邱學盟) installation *Floating Prayers* (漂流的禱) — 17 transparent plastic bags of water, each containing a photograph that has rolled up and faded because of its immersion in liquid — is difficult, if not impossible, to make anything of. Is it about memory? The environment?

And Lai Chih-sheng's (賴志盛) upside-down video footage of a car driving through Taipei in *The Reverse Reality* — (*Episode II*) (天空裡的現實II) might offer an alternate perspective on day-to-day existence, but it required a discussion with the curator to understand how. The video is of the route the artist takes on a daily basis from his studio to the university he works at, the curator explained. Inverting this routine shows how perceptions change as one's perspective changes.

Lee Ji-hong's (李基宏) 15-minute video *20081029 Square* (20081029廣場) explores the concept of time. He spent 24 hours walking around the square in front of Taipei's Grand Formosa Hotel as pictures were taken of him every six seconds. Lee said the video is meant to illustrate the repetitious nature of the daily grind. This is an idea many people can relate to, and some viewers will not doubt understand it intuitively. Others will likely watch a few seconds of the video, become bored and walk away scratching their heads.

"Some ordinary people do not have the art education to look at a piece and transfer it into their normal life," Lee said when asked about the video's meaning.

Perhaps. But it seems that most "ordinary people" do have this ability when the piece is accompanied with a brief introduction or explanation written in plain language. Although some of the installations in *Looking Up!* are self-explanatory, many will leave the viewer feeling more apathetic than enlightened.

Exhibition notes:

What: *Looking Up! Looking Down!* (抬頭一看·生活裡沒有任何美好的事)

Where: Eslite Xinyi Bookstore (誠品信義店), 5F, 11 Songgao Rd, Taipei City (台北市松高路11號5樓)

When: Until Aug. 2. Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 11 am to 7 pm

Telephone: (02) 8789-3388 X1588

Admission: Free

[TECHNOLOGY]

iPhone's marijuana service a must-have in California

Since California became the first US state to legalize the drug for medicinal purposes, it has become a major economic force, and its use more widely accepted

BY **ANDY GOLDBERG**
DPA, SAN FRANCISCO

The mighty iPhone may still be unable to brew you a cup of coffee or mix a perfect cocktail, but at least it can get you stoned.

Apple has just approved a new application for its must-have mobile device that locates legal marijuana dispensaries in the US for users of medical marijuana. The US\$3 download lists the known locations of medical collectives, doctors, clinics and organizations, placing them conveniently on a Google map. When iPhone users are in need of a quick fix, they can activate the app to find the nearest source of legal cannabis.

While the latest iPhone app does not break new ground technologically, it does reflect the growing acceptance of medical marijuana in the US and elsewhere. Medical use of cannabis is accepted in some form in Canada, Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, Israel, Finland and Portugal.

In the US, 13 states have recognized medical marijuana: Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.

Medical marijuana remains illegal under US federal law, where it is classed in the same category with hard drugs such as heroin.

Despite this hurdle, hundreds of marijuana dispensaries have opened up in recent years around the Golden State, where officials estimate that the total annual crop is worth a whopping US\$17 billion.

That dwarfs any legal crop grown in the largest US state. With California mired in a financial crisis, some policymakers even see a marijuana tax as a way to save essential public services that would otherwise be axed. Just last week, state tax officials estimated that imposing a tax on marijuana sales would yield a US\$1.4 billion windfall every year for California's state budget.



US iPhone users who are in a fix for a fix can turn to a new app that locates nearby medicinal marijuana dispensaries.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

The city of Oakland is not waiting for state bureaucrats to act. The densely populated area east of San Francisco already has so many pot dispensaries that it is called Oaksterdam, and on Tuesday, voters there decided to tax revenue from medicinal marijuana, becoming the first municipality in the US to do so.

"At this point, dude, seriously, let's just face the fact that everybody is smoking," said Jaime Galindo, owner of Oaksterdam's Club Z, a leading pot dispensary. "Bus drivers, cops — your grandma."

Los Angeles, which is estimated to be home to more than 400 dispensaries, is considering a city pot tax that would bring in hundreds of millions of US dollars a year.

Even if it escapes the seeming inevitability of taxation, there is little doubt that marijuana consumption is an established part of daily life, rather than a furtive underground activity like other drug use. The Pharmacy, a popular chain of

Los Angeles pot dispensaries, looks more like a fancy cosmetics emporium than a drug den, outfitted as it is with white leather couches and cream colored walls. Along with 25 different strains of marijuana, it also offers a range of organic toiletries, olive oil and incense.

Numerous other operations dispense altogether with marijuana store-fronts, offering more convenient delivery service by credit-card payment. Like every other marijuana dispensary, Kine2b checks patients' medical marijuana before handing over the goods. The owner says the delivery service is popular with customers, allows him to save rent money and avoids hassles with neighbors who don't want marijuana clubs next door.

"It's just like ordering pizza, only quicker and more professional," says customer John Gutierrez, a 56-year-old computer salesman who says that the marijuana eases his gout. "It's like I've died and gone to pot heaven."