

Entering *Departed*, the viewers seem to be temporary tourists in a self-defining human community: a city, perhaps, or a period in time. The surroundings are a mixture of the familiar and the strange, cross-cultural translated symbols and texts, sounds and images, creating a hybrid possibility we could be moving towards from our current state. A place without a name; an imagined community without a nation.

The temporality of *Departed* reminds the viewers that the collective memory formed in the space could quickly be forgotten, overwritten by the bland habits of the London street. Borrowing a model from the sociologist Anthony D. Smith, collective memory is one of the processes for forming a nation. If the gallery space is a territory, does leaving the exhibition dissolve a part of our identity, does it remove the possibility of a particular future?

“... the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home... And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement.”
- Edward Said (2001)

While art can both inspire and criticise the state, it is we who individually act or do not, drifting forwards into the future in all its complexity, choosing passivity or agency. The Kurds, the Palestinians, the Ainu and the Tamils are still waiting, and while most of us stand in a safe place, watching the future unfold, we are forever departing, because of our inaction, from the place we could have been.

- In response to the summer of 2019, departing from an imagined community on an island we could never visit.

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LOA

Departed
(from a place we’ve never been)

Curated by Yu’an H

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

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CREO (b. Declared an artist statement is a Diversity Information defined by the Data Protection Act (DPA), the artist would only discuss his work and personal information face to face instead of uploading any text online.) In CREO's work, one sees elements of old Chinese proverbs, afro hair, US political figures, all of which further confuse any assumptions that we may make about the artist.

Two Roads (2019) is the result of the artist's residency in Hong Kong (HKBU) in August 2019. Cards with English poetry are presented alongside their translation. The slight differences between traditional, simplified Chinese and written Cantonese surface after a closer examination. Inspired by the artist's first trip to the Far East, in the midst of the major transformation of the city, CREO uses online software as a way to express his observations. The piece marks the complex politics attached to this 'foreign' language and further examines the imperialistic positioning of the English language.

www.creo-creo.com

Lawrence Lek (b. 1982, Frankfurt) is a leading multimedia artist who has exhibited across the world, including at KW Berlin, Venice Biennale, and UCCA Beijing. Lek uses elements of contemporary social phenomena like influencer worship and the arrival of the AlphaGo to make what are in effect modern events appear dated, as if he is offering the viewer a chance to visit 'now' from the perspective of a post-singularity society.

Skyline (2014) was commissioned for Art Licks Weekend. The work is composed of a video game and a five minutes video displayed on two separate screens. Originally a critical response to the lack of infrastructure for independent galleries in London, The circular skyline train in Lek's work does not have a beginning nor an end stop. The video starts on a realistic London Underground train carriage. From the first person perspective, a Cantonese speaking voice emerges, joined by a Mandarin speaker:

'I can't go.. so i'll just have to imagine it' she said.

In the context of Departed, this conversation exchange is placed under a different light. What is the invisible barrier between the voices? The fictional infrastructure that is meant to serve as a solution to the influx of cross cultured residents of London quickly leads the viewer into a state of ruin.

lawrencelek.com

Tabitha Swanson (b.1991, Winnipeg) appears as a specimen of an online race. A designer and creative technologist using 3D rendering, face filter and sometimes synthetic makeup on her own body, offers us the vision of a migrant from a virtual world. The Canada born and raised third-culture child now lives and works in Berlin. With a background in fine art, fashion and design, Swanson approaches her practice in the same boundless way as she views her mixed heritage, which spans across the continents. She is currently an artist in residence at Factory Berlin as a part of sonar+D programme and part of Digi-Gxl, an international collective of womxn, trans, non-binary and intersex 3D animators and designers.

Fernweh (2019) is an Instagram face filter commissioned by LOA, available only during the exhibition period. The viewers will be able to use the filter both inside the physical exhibition and anywhere else. Once the exhibition closes the photos generated by viewers will be transformed and looked at as 'images from the past'.

[@tabithaswanson_](https://www.instagram.com/tabithaswanson_)

James Tabbush (b. 1991, London) is a British artist whose work includes digital, filmic, painting and photographic elements, often as installations. The basis of much of this lies in an extended study of the digital image as something which is exchanged, fragmented, desired and degraded as it travels. Hovering between emotional affect and cold distance, his recent painted works present a series of linked panels, a 'Browser' of imagery in multivalent greys. His film work ranges from looping gifs within viewing devices to cinematic essay films – common themes are the act of looking and being looked at, the sleeping body, and ideas around transience and the self.

Hong Kong 11 (2019) is a digital image printed on silk, part of a series of works begun in 2017. The image is a crop of a moment captured on Google Street View of Hong Kong, more than five years ago now. It is hard to see through the technological artefacts of the image - the patches of blurred pixels, the interpolated colours - to any clear content, but an atmosphere of place and loss leaks through. The work begins in ideas of distance and longing for something which is always escaping the viewer's grasp.

www.jamestabbush.com

Syan MC Yan, (b. 1971, Hong Kong) best known as a pioneer of Cantonese Rap and Graffiti, has tagged on the Great Wall of China and formed a band (LMF) in 1998, delivering iconic tracks that influenced the identity of the identity of the young Hongkongese with their lyrics, which contained cultural and political commentary. Syan a.k.a. MC Yan finished an MA in visual and conceptual art in France, returning to Hong Kong in the year of Handover, 1997. In recent years, the artist has returned to visual arts, creating installations outside gallery spaces described by the artist as painting with light, taking influences from Tibetan philosophy and occult sciences.

La Fleuve des Mots (2019) has been created for Departed and shipped to London from Hong Kong. A piece of news reporting quoting a telecom giant at the time of 1953 titled 'There will be no escape in future from telephones' is imprinted onto a long piece of aluminium and concealed in a clear briefcase. We are continuously 'warned' about the future, the changes, the technologies and the global happenings in the age of the internet. The piece invites a self examination of the paralysing anxiety an individual experiences when they view news from another place: the anxiety that comes both from our sense of agency and our sense of powerlessness.

[@gudiii](https://www.instagram.com/gudiii)

Leave of Absence is a self-sustaining art space that exists to explore the positioning of contemporary art, its creators and viewers in a transient age. LOA is hidden inside a private, gated courtyard off Dalston Lane, a small white cube space with limited opening hours to the public. Founded by five artists with different backgrounds, each nominated three artists to consider making work for the space: one friend, one inspiration and one artist that does not have the right to live and work in the UK. Exhibited artists then go on to make their own nominations, creating a self-augmenting network of connected ideas.