

copertina / cover

A photo from the work God Bless Diana (2000-2004) by Heman Chong.

Heman Chong's project *God Bless Diana* (2000-2004) encapsulates the working methods and world-view of an artist constantly on the move. Having based himself in Europe for the past five years, Chong embraces the fragmented yet expansive nature of contemporary mobility, using as his raw materials the everyday objects, moments and slippages that construct a sense of place and identity. His videos, photographs and installations consistently frame his own experience within a broader notion of community, questioning the ways in which subjectivities are formed in a shifting global environment.

God Bless Diana takes the conceptual form of an archive, based on a series of 550 photographs selected from a pool of over 6,000. Printed as postcards and sold from an elegantly designed 'postcard boutique', the images are then able to be redistributed into the world. Each postcard is considered an artwork in its own right, able to function individually as well as collectively, with its accessibility, affordability and functionality resisting the exclusiveness of the art world. Yet Chong's boutique is more than a dispassionate analysis or critique of the commercial circulation of images. By connecting his own experiences and aesthetic choices to those who purchase his cards and then receive them in the mail, Chong creates a complex web of human relationships, linking imagination and reality, the individual and society.

Despite its sense of vastness and multiplicity, *God Bless Diana* displays Chong's interest in structures and systems. Ordered into categories, the images are a taxonomy of urban life from Singapore to London to Beijing to New York: signage, foliage, rubble, graffiti. Numerous motifs recur throughout, including grids, crosses and coils, betraying a sculptural sensibility that is echoed in the clean cube of the boutique. While seemingly random, the photographs are all carefully composed, obeying the formal requirements of shape, space and composition. The urban landscape becomes an open field of potential readymades, waiting to be framed and refigured by the lens of the artist's camera. Chong is intrigued by what he calls the 'life and times of objects', and the narratives that these involve extend from the economic processes of production and exchange into the personalised nature of everyday consumption. The display of objects as an index of identity has been a feature of a number of the artist's works, from the table piled with food, cigarettes and office furniture in *Divided Tonight* (with Corinna Kniffki, 2004) to the stacks of glasses, books and chairs in *The Silver Sessions* (2003). Always rigorously arranged, the objects take on an allegorical dimension that the artist calls 'cinematic', forming a productive tension between the real and the world of imagination and play. This element is generously extended in *God Bless Diana*, with its implication of the world as the artist's studio, and his audience as fellow travellers.

Text by Russell Storer

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