

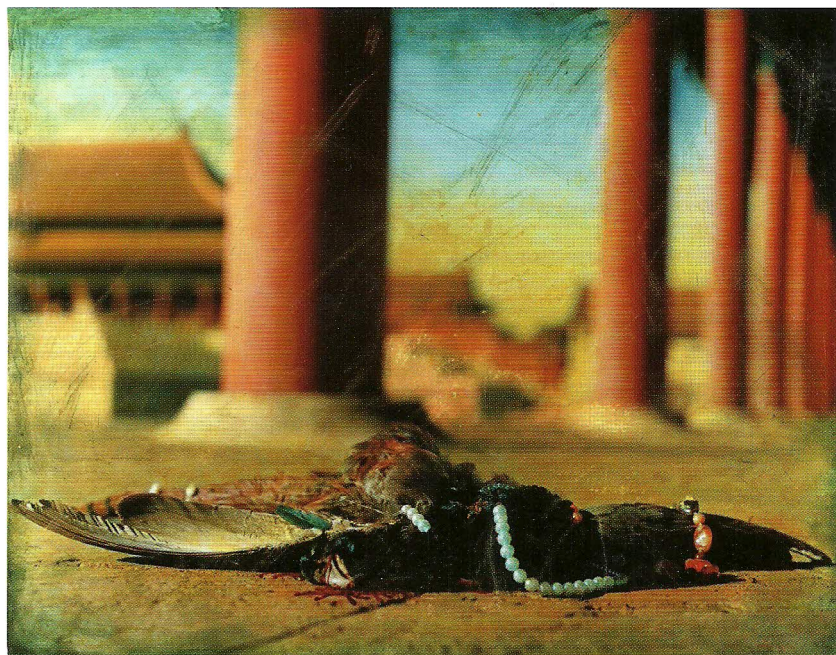
exposures

Photography and China

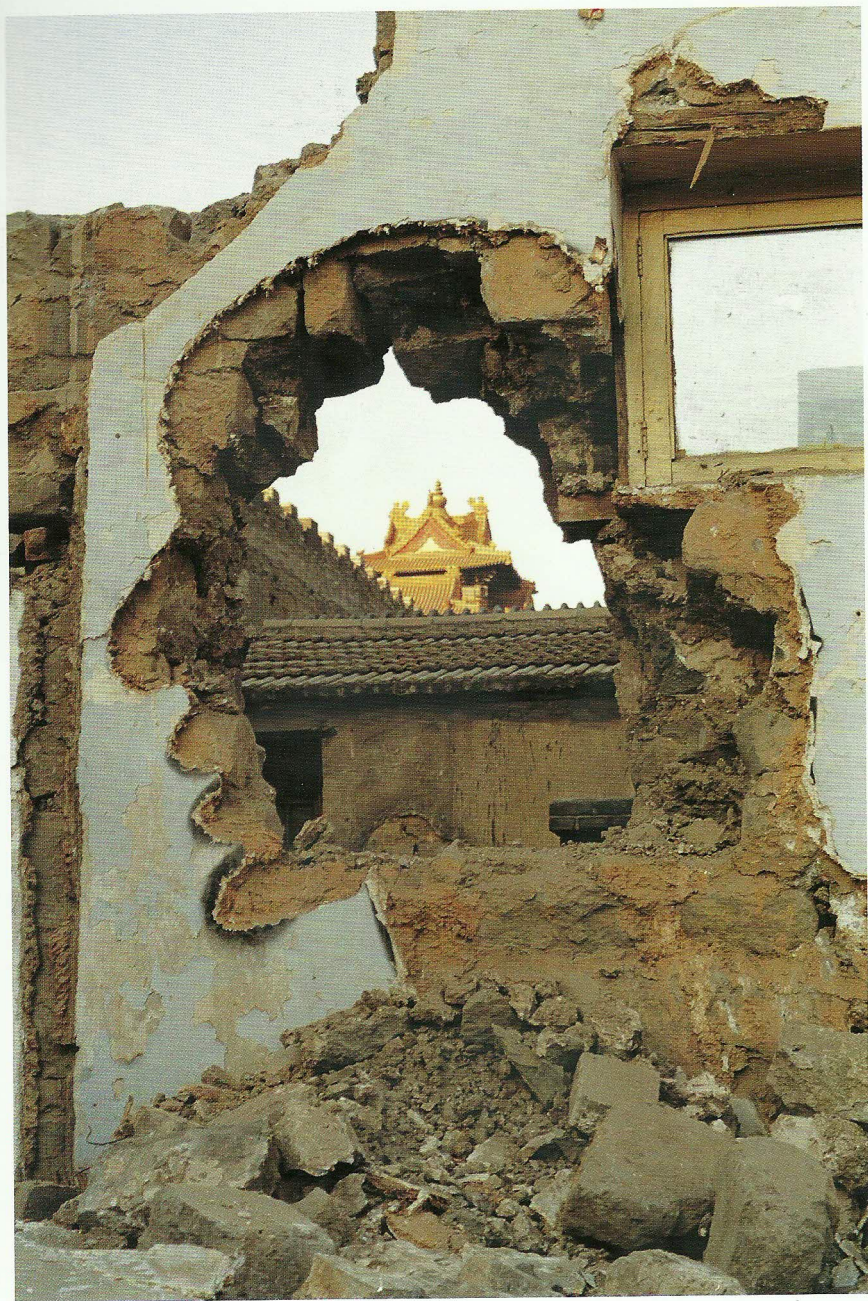
Claire Roberts



120 Hong Lei, *Autumn in The Forbidden City, Taihe Hall, East Verandah, 1997*, chromogenic print.



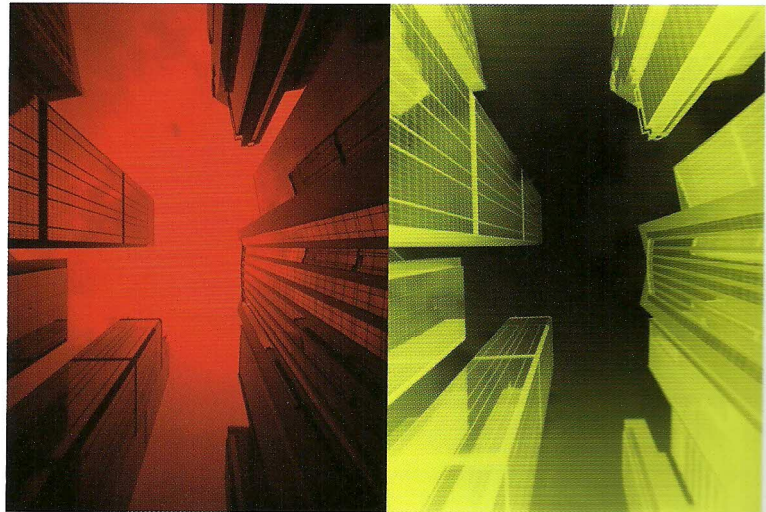
brehtaking speed to make way for high-rise office towers, apartments, shopping malls and freeways. During the late 1990s graffiti heads became a ubiquitous sign in the streets and laneways of Beijing. The bald profiles sprayed in black paint remained anonymous until 1998 when the artist Zhang Dali (*b.* 1963) claimed authorship. Zhang Dali had taken up graffiti art in Bologna (he left China in 1989) in response to his sense of alienation, and introduced guerrilla art to the streets of Beijing after his return in 1995. His tough-guy profiles drew attention to ruins, the linear heads acting as witnesses to the destruction of neighbourhoods. Like the developers, Zhang Dali worked under the cover of darkness and returned to take photographs of his heads *in situ*. 'It suddenly dawned on me', he said, 'that the surrounding environment was a natural part of the work. The great changes that were taking place in the Chinese environment provided a stage that was very different from anything I had experienced in any other country. That head is myself, having returned to the source.'⁹



121 Zhang Dali, *Dialogue: Forbidden City*, 1998, chromogenic print.

In *Dialogue: Forbidden City* (1998) Zhang shows destruction close to the ancient imperial heart. By hacking his profile out of the wall of a partially demolished dwelling, Zhang's head becomes a window onto the Forbidden City, drawing attention to the beauty and splendour of the World Heritage Site, and the violence of change.

A Hong Kong artist who sojourned in Italy is Leung Chi Wo (*b.* 1968), a graduate of the Department of Fine Arts at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Leung was the recipient of an Italian government scholarship and in 1991 he undertook a postgraduate diploma there in the culture of photography. For many years Leung has used a self-made 4 x 5 pinhole camera to capture unusual views of Hong Kong in an attempt to remember the space of the city before sovereignty of the Territory was returned to China in 1997.¹⁰ In a notable series of related works Leung stands at intersections in Hong Kong (he began the series in New York), directing the camera and his gaze upwards, focusing on the sky. Photographs taken at different points of the intersection are cut out and collaged to create a two dimensional work that focuses on the area of void created by the forest of skyscrapers. The sky is transformed into a defined, positive space that also appears threatened. In his *Colour Photo* series he uses filters to print from black-and-white negatives, adding an additional layer of abstraction.



122 Leung Chi Wo, *Gloucester & Gloucester*, 2001, chromogenic print.