

Chris Sullivan
Portfolio



On Practice

Achronicity and Place

Photography exists between the fixed and the ephemeral; it freezes an instant and, in doing so, lies. It suggests that what we see can be known when seeing is only ever partial. A photograph offers everything and explains nothing.

My practice explores this friction. Within a photograph, memory and moment diverge to become something else, a subjective rendering that often conceals its context, authorship, and the web of relationships it contains.

Part of this exploration involves embracing chance; by using a slow shutter, I sacrifice clarity for impressions of movement, creating short films within a single frame. This approach demands presence, a durational looking that attends to what might otherwise pass unseen. Surfaces become exaggerated, abstracted; unintentional artefacts shaped by time and light.

Figurative approaches complement these abstractions. In colour, images take on a documentary-like directness. In highlight-weighted black-and-white, I allow shadow to obscure much of the detail, thus ushering in a form of temporal latency.

These approaches share a central concern: considering the ephemeral nature of experience and reflecting on Hong Kong, my home, all while leaning into the subjectivity of seeing.

Genuinely looking takes time. It requires allowing oneself space for attention to settle, just as we might notice our heart rate slow after a run. In this act, there is care in simply recognising what's there and choosing to remain.

Adapted from: [*Notes on Practice*](#).

Biography

Chris Sullivan is a photographer and writer based in Hong Kong, where he has lived and worked for close to a decade. His work moves between black-and-white and colour photography, moving image, and reflective writing, blending documentary observation with essayistic fragments.

He approaches photography as a form of thinking, attuned to rhythm, memory, and the traces of disappearance.

In 2025, he was selected by the jury for FRESH EYES x Hungry Eye, an initiative by *GUP Magazine* spotlighting emerging photography talent. His work will be featured in PlasticVisions, a group exhibition curated by LoosenArt in Rome, Italy (forthcoming, November 2025). His reflective essay *A Slower Mode of Time* was published in *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*. He also contributed a photo essay to *The Light Observer* (Issue 8), exploring the porous boundary between Hong Kong's visible surfaces and the unseen emotional landscapes we carry within.

Chris is currently pursuing new photography and writing projects.

I alight from the bus with Hokkien still ringing in my ears. Something in the rhythm follows me home. I dodge the centrifugal fan and skip through the security gate, keeping the tempo alive, until the lift doors close in front of me, bringing the rhythm to a stop. I'm sweating; my t-shirt, fresh out of its Uniqlo packaging that morning, has already formed a close bond with my back. Still, the washing machine is near at hand, and a future of threadbare comfort is but a few wash cycles away. A promise of good days to come.

We wrap ourselves in layers. Some cling to the skin, like the sweat-laden clothes of a Hong Kong summer; others lie deeper: language, memory, time. The writer Juan Emar imagines time not as a straight line, but as something suspended and strange, a fabric where different beings move at irreconcilable speeds. While humans plod through thought with the same sluggishness we've carried since Adam, lions live in the velocity of planets, their movements compounding time itself, breakneck and enraged.¹ I think of this as the lift pulls me upward between floors, temperatures and thoughts. The residue of the Hokkien rhythm fades from my mind as my body slows, acclimatising to the cooler indoor temperature and the static hum of machinery. Emar's sense of time is a feeling I recognise here, twenty floors above the street, suspended between velocity and stillness, ground and sky.

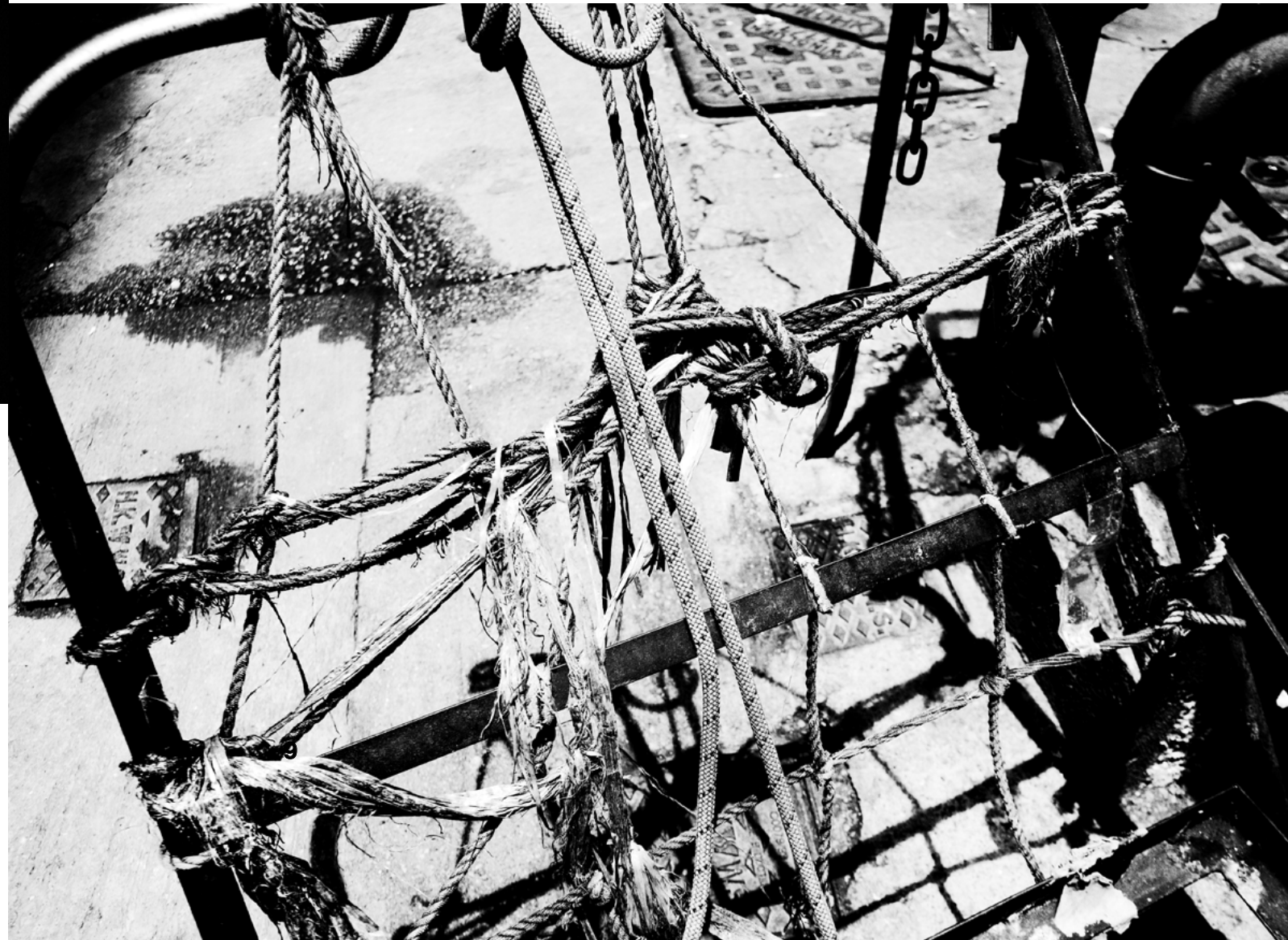
Ackbar Abbas describes Hong Kong as a space of transit, where something's always slipping away even as it arrives. The title of this series—*Déjà Disparu*—describes a condition where presence is already lost. 'What is new and unique about the situation is always already gone,' he writes, 'and we are left holding a handful of clichés, or a cluster of memories of what has never been.'² In this city of overlapping presents, disappearance is a condition of arrival.

This sense of disappearance felt particularly acute during the pandemic, the time I started this series. The shadows that fill these images felt fitting then. What once felt raw now seems layered with new meaning and a growing sense of distance, like a language overhead on a bus

that is not understood, that is present yet ungraspable.

- 1 Juan Emar, *Yesterday* (New Directions Publishing, 2022), 23–24.
- 2 Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 4.





Mediation

Circa 2016–2025
Compiled in 2025

<https://chris.photo/mediation>

Your floor is my ceiling.

We stack ourselves into Tetris blocks along the roadside. A human mishmash. Between us: thin walls—physical and psychic—scratched by routine and marked by the week's grime.

We share rubbish bins, lifts, and laminated notices. Reminders not to let dogs pee in said lifts, or toss refuse from windows. The subtext? Proximity is a fragile thing. We're all just trying to manage it.

I've been in Hong Kong for almost ten years now. That thought hits as I glance up at a billboard on Bristol Avenue. A woman, mid-forkful of spaghetti, beams down and in cursive script proclaims:

Live Italian. Live with passion!

Her charisma is all carbs and confidence. Being half Neapolitan, I feel only partly judged. I clock the message and make a quiet deal with myself to step outside my comfort zone more often. A forkful of courage at a time.

People often say that Italy's an open-air museum. *Un museo all'aperto*. But isn't everywhere? Some cities preserve marble ruins. Others archive themselves in red, white, and blue laundry bags, grease-stained menus, and flyers taped to shuttered shopfronts. These are the palimpsests of the everyday. The city speaks through them, even as it forgets what it just said.

Maybe every city archives its forgetting. Maybe what holds isn't marble (or myth), but plastic and ink and the quiet wish to be noticed.

I suppose it doesn't matter where you go. The stories of a place don't sit still. They shift, detach, reattach, peel off, emigrate. They live among us in impermanence. We stack ourselves the same way, into apartments and office blocks, into the small courtesies that make proximity bearable. And maybe that's enough, to be part of someone else's architecture, even briefly.







Kinetic City

2016–2017, 2024–2025
Compiled in 2025

<https://chris.photo/kinetic-city>

I'm across from the Mongkok Police Station, sitting in a near-empty cafe and nursing a now-cold espresso. The weather's tuned into its pre-summer station. Beyond my perch, crowds flock toward the Flower Market, and tourists queue for dim sum next door. The poster in its window—*Let's Yum Cha!*—provides salvation in this parched corner where asphalt and concrete conspire with heat. The cyclone wire atop the station wall glitters in the sun.

Lately, I've left the camera at home. Instead, I read, write, and archive, making connections between images taken years apart. I'm slow to realise things and ruminate often. This reflective process reminds me of therapy, where I think through the why of things, wrestling with concerns that are easily set aside. It takes time, goes at its own pace, is frustrating, but it's a constant I live alongside.

I think of this work as a weather report, registering shifts in light, temperature, and movement. Hong Kong appears not as a fixed place but as a fluctuating surface. I'm interested in how those surfaces speak, how they hold traces of care, carelessness, attention, time.

This sensitivity to time echoes in Ariella Azoulay's reminder that photographs are never finished; they remain open, reshaped in each viewing.¹ Maybe that's why I keep circling these images. Not to explain them but to sit with them, to see what they reflect back on the city and me. After all, we don't see things as they are; we see them as we are. That idea, often attributed to Anaïs Nin, feels especially true here. Each act of looking becomes a kind of self-reckoning.

Within this process, I've realised the question is more essential than the answer. Perhaps this is a quirk of my lapsed Catholicism, a spiritual concern easy with questions, not always forthcoming with answers.

What's involved in looking? Is it possible to photograph Hong Kong in such a way as to think with it? What does it mean for my gaze to be non-local? Is a photograph ever not exploitative? What responsibilities do I have holding the camera, and where do they end?

The images serve as forms for thinking: amalgamated pixels that needle and prod or simply sit with ambiguity. If there's any resolution, it's only that I've stayed with the asking long enough to let it shape the work.

Perhaps that's enough for now.

¹ Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Civil Imagination, A Political Ontology of Photography* (Verso, 2024), 31.





