## TO MICHELANGELO AND DA VINCI 咀嚼周夜禪 FROM GRAY STREETS AND RED CABS

been experimenting with Raphael's School of Athens Vinci's The Last Supper, and Creation of Adam, da of Michelangelo's The large-scale reinterpretations 周俊灣 (Chow Chun-fai) has

By Koon Yee-wan

of gods and saints, Chow uses of da Vinci is diffused. he ruffles our expectations - the biblical characters. In so doing images of himself swathed in instead of the familiar figures is flattened; and the moral vision compositional power of Raphael figures is blurred; the muscularity of Michelangelo's dapper black suits as parodies of burnt amber togas or dressed in The parodying of famous

talian Renaissance. However,

paintings of the tiled together to e uses photographs form the iconic

comical, grotesque and

irreverent parodies underscore

naked body in her provocative using digital manipulations to Yasumasa Morimura has been these shores, the Japanese artist patches on a quilt. Closer to homage with needlework and a group of Texan ladies paying masterpiece has extended to reinterpretation of the Italian painting. The pervasiveness of version of da Vinci's famous testament. Renee Cox used her Supper series becoming his final do so in the 1980s, with his Last art since the 1980s. Morimura's subvert the cultural barriers of da Vinci adds to the experience of viewing. It makes us aware that the act of looking is never cramp from looking up at his his Fotan studio. Getting a neck

of the dualities that are brought that is Warhol. However, is he the postmodern heretic bender like Morimura. Nor her Gaultier conical bustier. or camping it up as Madonna in prostitute in Manet's Olympia artworks and icons, such as manipulations of famous into focus with his photographic culture, East and West, artist the clashes of high and low Chow recognizes the value of placing himself as the audacious emininity. Those are just some and viewer, and masculinity and Chow is not a gender-

readings. What is more

say with his reconstructions. wonders what Chow is trying to and even in a lawsuit, one on a book cover, in a film reel of these Renaissance paintings of Adam hangs on the ceiling of dissembled, and his Creation his Academy has just been Hong Kong Heritage Museum, recent saturation of at least one commodities. Indeed, given the Renaissance paintings as cultura His Last Supper is now in the Michelangelo's renowned piece staccato tiling effect of the photos figures into semi-abstract objects structures, transforming his image, sometimes tilting the tile patterning. Chow blurs the distorting effect of cascading and light. Meanwhile, using the and contrasting bands of dark with a variety of saturated hues remains true to the Renaissance quality of the depicted objects, the photo finish and the syntheti the colors, despite the gloss of of the original. The richness of retains the monumental presence into patches of color and the The muscular form of Adam turns

in the 1960s and continued to enterprise. Andy Warhol did it paintings is not a new

His approach hybridizes generated by Op Art paintings. creates a vibration of the sort acts as traces of brushstrokes. The dizzying optical illusion

we are on guard, alert to these high on his ceiling. As viewers

masculinity of Asian men? The Maybe he is poking fun at the Or is he humoring us about work without getting sidetracked appreciate his labor-intensive allows the viewer to instead and this relative freedom there is no one issue at stake all of the above. Ultimately, answer is probably none or the commodification of art? at the hypocrisy of religion? society's hierarchy of beauty laughing at? Is he snickering at teases - but what is Chow the touch of God mocks and outstretched arm awaiting plastic artificiality of Adam's of his Barbie equivalents. The element evokes Morimura's use dolls. Yes, dolls. This kitsch partially naked men and plastic as we take in the images of glide over the photographs a passive experience. Our eyes

compelling is his play with visual forms. Chow's reinterpretation of into a minefield of postmodern the cabs become menacing red of the cabs are depicted from a cacophony of Hong Kong, Many low viewpoint; the viewers take trade - Chow composes a reference to his father's former paintings of the red cabs - a urban world. In a series of tempo and rhythm of a teeming red boxy Toyotas capture the York's yellow cabs, Hong Kong's London's black taxis and New art galleries and critics. As with well-deserved attention from his first themes that also drew of a city sprawl, was one of a ubiquitous symbol with icons. The taxi, how likes to play

of the source image so that the omits certain pictorial elements, create painterly effects is also iconography. It is almost antithan playing with the narrative impact of his models rather on the subject. Instead, his His ego does not intrude repetition is such that they Christ in The Last Supper, the example, although he casts as the appropriations. For omissions become as important deflating the symbolic power strengthened by the way he using photographic craft to painting and photography. decoding in Chow's da Vinci narrative; there is no need for intended to capture the visual photographic paintings are almost erase his presence. himself as the disciples and The overall impression of

through bus windows, and again on the eye level of a child's, and too unlike the Creation of Adam perspective of his audience - not Chow is determining the viewing beasts. Sometimes, they are seen

Tsimshatsui

and back again. familiar becomes the unfamilia graphic and the painterly, the those interplays between the perspectival plays. Through exaggerated sense of scale are the dramatic sharp angles, the the other. The cropped views, up close and personal, one afte we are not used to seeing them we know these are cabs but sense of seeing and knowing close observations play with our changes, in part because the

> silent. That same silence is those paintings are almost overwhelming sense of noise cab paintings presents an

taking snapshots of the same scenes is achieved by Chow's distorted. The distortion of the time is stopped, eclipsed and Instead of the hustle and bustle narrative movement of street life to another. They interrupt the out, shifting from one perspective one canvas - zooming in and are sometimes melded all on But the perspectival plays there his series of Hong Kong streets. of mirrors effect instills a sense of concave mirror image. The hall almost as if we are looking at a angles are erased, making the The joins between different that are then quilted together. street scene from multiple views removed. Thus, unlike Hopper image, leaving viewers doubly appears as an image within an estrangement because the scene scene seamless but distorted, He uses the same approach one feel such a strong affection of blacks and blues. Rarely does pinks and earthy greens. The richness recalls the cinematic from the silvery light to the He uses a spectrum of grays, diners, Chow's cha chan teng

sitting on the high stools, any do not relate to the anonymous us along - not the figures. We gazes, making us pause, moving shops, of signs that direct our figures crossing the streets or It is the structure of roads, of

for a rainbow of grays.

be applauding. a

that has stopped in time. commercial and cultural traffiwhich become vectors of plays and a subdued palette, are grounded in perspectival emotive weight, Chow's paintings whose figures are loaded with If the multitude of red

an otherwise melancholy world bursts of shallow yellows, dusly steely dark punctuated by small as urban yearnings of the heart paintings have been described icons of Canto-life. Like Hopper's these small local restaurants are Like the red cab, the interiors of evoked even more strongly in his 茶餐廳 (cha chan teng) series. that also use accents of colors in tones of Hopper's somber works contradicts the interest in observations and linear of interest in scientific era known for a flourishing realm of the Renaissance - an painterly effects meanders interest in perspective and he turns Italian paintings into his painterly urban world, and Chow plays with mediums - he of his Renaissance forebears. vanishing-point perspectives flatness of his photographs perspective. However, the way very naturally into the interesting part of the current interrelationship forms an photographs of himself. This uses photographs to create In many ways, Chow's early

for some of us, of belonging, thus have a sense of place, and Wanchai. Navigated by Chow, we a friend who's stuck in a cab in Christ's disciples. We relate to the more than we do with Adam or (dong nai chal) while waiting for where we drink our 凍奶茶 space - it's the little restaurant landscape of Hong Kong art: There are other young artists of geographical ide cha chan teng sens areas can be seen a moment, gray street of his trinity of stori materiality of art. our visual expectat nanging scrolls that Artists are importathe point. Not all h mediums. Athough similar issues of for and forms. These t to be his favorite su and Renaissance pa photography through relationship with pa watching, and char artist. We'll be wai will be playing as a say next, and of wh questions of what point that Chow is the globalization of his interest and his succeed, but togeth his works only thro the theme of Hong same scheme, worl He is thinking abou Chow is still expl

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paintings of bamboo blinds as paintings of surfaces with her produces labor-intensive Hong Kong, for example, also (Kwok Ying), a fellow graduat

of the Chinese University of experimental plays. 郭瑛 who also engage with such