





**Urban Imaginary Series**

*Urban Imaginary Series* is an international project series on alternative cultural strategies in the urban context. The first project series, **Cities of Desire: Vienna < > Hong Kong** (September 2008 to March 2009) takes the form of an interdisciplinary arts exchange between the two cities. The project deals with the critique of image representation of city regions and addresses bottom-up place-making art practices.



**Cities of Desire**

The urban cultural exchange project between Vienna and Hong Kong, *Cities of Desire* is about the potential of arts in reconstructing the urban cultural and socio-political sphere. It is not, as might be inferred from the title, an investigation of new forms of place promotion, nor the marketing of Vienna and Hong Kong employing artistic means.

Thematically it starts a critical discourse on the top-down place-making strategies and image representation in city regions worldwide, against a backdrop of intensifying global competition among increasingly footloose investment capital, talents and tourists. The project, including the exhibition, focuses on art practices that deal with strategies of resistance against hegemonic place-making rhetoric in the urban context.

How far can artists or community initiatives participate in determining or fine-tuning urban conditions they consider obsolete or too manipulative? How can an artistic process of production interact with the place-making imagination to have the potential to deliver inventive urban experiences and narratives for cities?

Looking more precisely into the cultural geography of Vienna and Hong Kong, two prototypical cities, as popular tourist destinations, both deploy specific cultural strategies and connotations to brand themselves as desirable cities to visit. Like their counterparts worldwide, both cities are increasing their investment in cultural apparatus including the 'creative industry', art festivals, flagship museums, cultural clusters, sanitised neighbourhoods with upscale bars and restaurants,

*Reportage on the Social Movement against Queen's Pier Demolition, Ducky Tse, 2007*

and in reviving the heritage sector in the thriving tourist industry; culture is increasingly being moulded into different forms for immediate consumption.

Upon the making of places for quick consumption, the city's complex, multi-layered cultures are often reduced to a single entity; new places are created to convene programmed meanings and inscribed identities. Acknowledging city governments are increasingly working with the cultural sector on the creation of urban spectacles, narrative and reality. The *Urban Imaginary Series* is interested in exploring how these narratives could be (re)constructed through artistic interventions. How can urban space be re-appropriated to create inventive experiences? What are the strategies of resistance against the current production of places and identity?

The exhibition is a critique of the frantic imaging politics and culturalisation of urban space and the neutralisation of political spaces through cultural means. It showcases bottom-up place-making tactics, including architectural projects that reinterpret urban space and reconstruct social spaces with direct community participation: installations and sound work that deal with a critique of cultural representation, as well as videos and photographs documenting artistic and activist interventions in public space. It is the prologue to start the discourse on the politics of place-making, a more in-depth discussion will be generated at a roundtable talk with international speakers from the arts, architecture and cultural policy. New projects by participating artists from both cities are to be realised in both Vienna and Hong Kong to experiment with alternative strategies for place-making. (H. T.)