

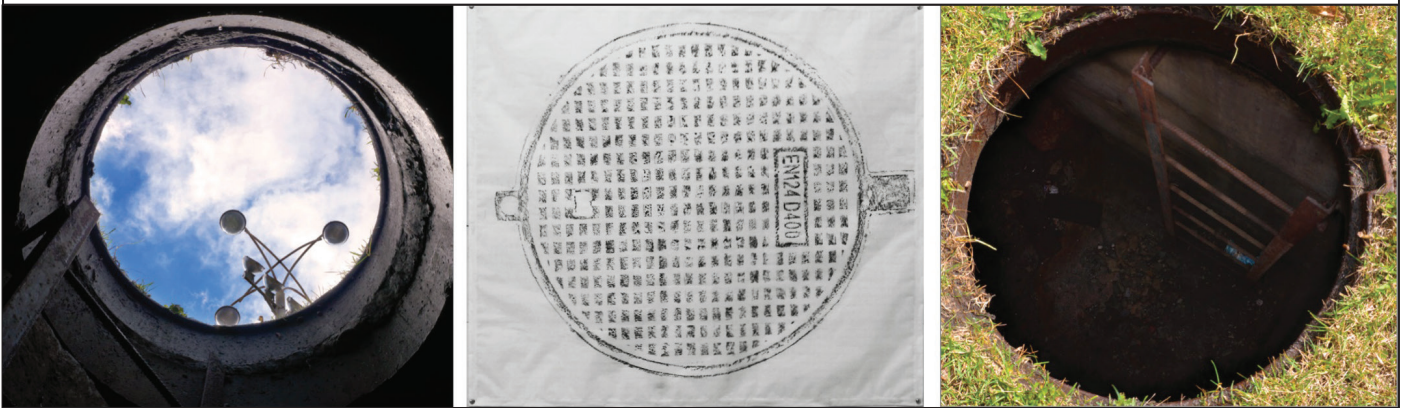
# SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement

Wong Hoy Cheong

*UNcover* on Cockatoo Island

21st Biennale

of Sydney



*UNcover: Manhole at the Residence of the President of the Russian Federation, 2015*  
digital prints and wax rubbings on rice paper, three images  
75 x 85 cm (each)  
Courtesy the artist  
Photograph: Wong Hoy Cheong

A series of works called *UNcover* by Wong Hoy Cheong start on the streets and explore histories and places in the city through sites where power is enacted. The work is a set of images – photographs and wax rubbings – of 'access covers' that mark sites of mobilisation, resistance and conflict in Russia.

By recognising the history of these places, his work makes visible hot spots in social and political reality that are layered into the urban geography. His images are traces, or visual reproductions, of sites, but also serve as metaphors for the exercise of power that takes place in conflict, violence, protest and rebellion.

The work consists of photographs taken from above and below, and wax rubbings of the access cover that separates the two worlds and points of view. By looking up from underground, the photograph captures the sky and urban cityscape; while, by looking down, the subterranean shadows and underground network of the city is revealed. The rubbing becomes the marker between these two culturally defined spaces. This individual image, which is a copy or replica of the access cover, separates and joins these two worlds.

The three-part cross-section of the location becomes a reminder of events that took place, and of social meanings for politics and exercises of power.

## Questions for Discussion

1. How much do you know about the history of Sydney? And the history of where you live? What has happened in your area in your lifetime? Who are the traditional custodians of the land?
2. What architectural features of your area have you noticed? Which buildings have historical significance?
3. Can you research your area and find hidden elements in the fabric of the everyday public streets?
4. Are there events and places you can document through these elements, to tell a story that most people wouldn't know about?

## Reference Points

To understand this artwork requires contemplation on our part, and some research into the locations that the artist has selected. We need to know a little of the story of the location for the work to become meaningful. The work itself shows us something hidden, or buried in the past, and the images become a stand in for the story of what happened in these places. By focusing on places of power, the work becomes an emblem of history, asking us as viewers to explore the complex realities of social and political conflict and change.

The presentation of a set of images in a grid is also important, referencing as it does systems of knowledge and the ordering of information through repetition and difference.

Artists who have explored similar themes and/or methodologies, and who have exhibited in past Biennale of Sydney exhibitions (dates listed), could include: Roy Arden (1998), Kader Attia (2010), Bernd and Hilla Becher (1979), Gordon Bennett (1992, 2000, 2008), Sophie Calle (1990, 2000), Yevgeniy Fiks (2008), Susan Hiller (1982, 1996, 2002, 2010), William Kentridge (1996, 2008) and Shirin Neshat (1996, 2000).

## Practices and Processes

To produce a body of work inspired by these processes may seem straightforward, however, these simple almost documentary techniques need to be effectively linked to ideas and ways of understanding the images they generate. This is why your research into the objects of your project is important, as is the ordering of your display of the work. A three-stage process might look like this:

### Drawing

Take a walking tour and find the places and objects you have researched, and select some that you would like to work with. Make quick sketches of them and write about each one, and why you have chosen it. Think about how they fit together – are they multiple versions of the same thing? Are they different things that are linked through the story you are trying to tell?

### Rubbings

Make a map of your selection of objects in your neighbourhood. Plan to visit them individually, and using wax crayon, graphite or charcoal on fine paper, make several rubbings of these objects. Some drawings may be a complete representation of the surface, or you could fragment the drawings and do sections. Present the completed drawings as a collection, and the drawing fragments as a different collection. How does the presentation of your selection tell a story? What is revealed by the rubbings, and what remains hidden? Use the rubbings as the basis for drawing work.

### Drawing

Can you reproduce the visual effect of the rubbing through drawing? Rather than creating an imprint of the objects, draw them from different perspectives while trying to preserve the aesthetic of the rubbing (tone, mark, positive and negative space). This deliberate drawing of the rubbing should expand your visual language and skills – you are now drawing marks rather than representing things. Is this an approach you have used before? How does it improve your drawing?

**Cultural frame:**  
globalisation, society,  
politics