

TSENG Kwong Chi Biography

TSENG Kwong Chi (born Hong Kong 1950, died New York 1990) is internationally known for his major photographic series entitled ***Expeditionary Self-Portrait Series*** a.k.a. ***East Meets West***. In this series of over 100 images, he poses in front of iconic architecture and sublime nature, investigating tourist photography in a playful juxtaposition of truth, fiction, and identity: “***a cross between Ansel Adams and Cindy Sherman.***”

During his brief, but prolific 10-year career from 1979-1989, TSENG also created other series of vibrant color and black-and-white photographs of his contemporaries such as Keith Haring, Andy Warhol, Julian Schnabel, Jean-Michel Basquiat, McDermott and McGough, Kenny Scharf, Philip Taaffe, Madonna, Grace Jones, the B-52's, and Fab Five Freddy which form a rich historical archive of the New York downtown Art world of the 1980's.

Born in Hong Kong, China on September 6, 1950, TSENG Kwong Chi received training in traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy before moving to Canada with his family at the age of 16. He studied painting and photography at the L'École Superior d'Arts Graphiques at L'Academie Julien in Paris, France, graduating in 1974. Longing for a dynamic artistic environment, Tseng relocated to New York City in 1978.

TSENG became intrigued by travel and the presence of Asian tourists in Western culture, developing his own artistic persona as a Chinese dignitary or "Ambiguous Ambassador." Dressed in the classic Mao Tse-Tung suit, dark eyeglasses, and an identity tag stamped "SlutforArt," starting in New York City, and later, the world, he posited himself amidst stereotypical tourist sites, from the Eiffel Tower to Niagara Falls, from the Statue of Liberty to the Grand Canyon. His ***Expeditionary Self-Portrait Series***, a.k.a. ***East Meets West***, chronicle his ricocheting between nature and culture, and his investigations of tourism, tourist photography, and cultural identity.

TSENG immediately joined the East Village scene. Blending the worlds of art and society, he became a much-touted documentarian and denizen of the spirited downtown New York club and art scene. He appeared in many performance art works at venues such as the Pyramid Club, Club 57, the Mudd Club, MK, Paradise Garage, and the Palladium.

TSENG formed a close friendship with Keith Haring and became Haring's "official" photographer, recording Haring's art process in over 40,000 images of Haring in the studio, art openings, his early subway drawings and late large-scale public art commissions. These photographs form the most extensive **Keith Haring historical archive** in the world.

TSENG also took portraits of other now-famous artists including Andy Warhol, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kenny Scharf, Julian Schnabel, Peter Halley, and many others of the New York 1980's art scene in an archive of over 10,000 images.

Tseng injected an ironic twist to high society and fashion shoots in his editorial work for The Soho Weekly News, Vogue (US, Italian, German, French), Travel & Leisure, GQ, and Vanity Fair.

On March 10, 1990, TSENG died in New York at age 39 from complications related to the AIDS virus. He left an enduring body of work that engages major photographic traditions -- the tourist snapshot, portraiture, *tableaux d'histoire*, and the Sublime tradition of landscape photography -- as well as documentary and commercial photography and performance.

TSENG's photography has been exhibited widely, including shows at Centre Pompidou in Paris, the 2004 Shanghai Biennale, the 1985 Whitney Biennial, The Smithsonian Institute, International Center for Photography, The New Museum, The Bronx Museum, The Andy Warhol Museum, Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, and The Asia Society. His work is represented by

Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York, and has been in gallery shows in Milan, Berlin, Amsterdam, St. Tropez, and Madrid.

TSENG's work is in many public collections, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, George Eastman House, New York Public Library, The New School, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Walker Art Center, Wellesley College Art Museum, Los Angeles County Art Museum, and Hallmark Collection. His artwork is also part of many important family collections including the Rubell Collection in Miami and the Alturas Collection in Boston.

The monograph ***Tseng Kwong Chi: Self Portraits 1979-1989***, featuring 100 self-portraits, was published by Paul Kasmin Gallery in 2009. A hardcover monograph, ***Tseng Kwong Chi: Ambiguous Ambassador***, was published by Nazraeli Press in 2005 and is distributed in limited edition worldwide.