

Art Review:

OCTOBER
2006

Special Focus: Art Photography

PORTFOLIO



Sze Tsung Leong

BY NORMAN BRYSON

I have chosen Sze Tsung Leong's remarkable series of large-format photographs portraying the dramatically changing urban environment in the People's Republic of China. In terms of the sheer number of new buildings, their scale, and the transformation of social, economic and cultural life that they represent, urban development in China is unmatched anywhere in the world. Documenting the destruction of the previous fabric of Chinese cities and the sudden emergence of entirely new cityscapes, still in pristine condition, is a major undertaking, impossible in its entirety: but Sze Tsung Leong's selections and emphases are astute. When, in the future, people look back on this traumatic period in modern Chinese history, these photographs will be an indispensable reference point, a treasure house, comparable to the work of the nineteenth-century photographers who captured the look of medieval Paris on the eve of its replacement by the modern metropolis.

Nowhere else is the double-edged nature of power so clearly represented: as the capacity to summon, almost out of thin air, an entirely new order and scale of architecture, and as the capacity to erase and obliterate, to rewrite history according to the perspective of the (present) victors.

Norman Bryson is Professor of Art History at the University of California, San Diego. His publications include [Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting, Tradition and Desire: From David to Delacroix](#) and [Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze](#).

Picture credit:
Sze Tsung Leong, *Tiananmen Square, Beijing, 2002*,
C-print. Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York