

art

'The Boxes' depicts
the exotic as so much less

By Teresa Annas
The Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK

ARTIST Chung, "Fanky" Chak moved to the United States from his native Hong Kong in 1989 and has lived in about a dozen places since then, from small towns to big cities. Now he's situated in Cranford, N.J., and teaches graphic design at The College of New Jersey.

His latest body of work, on display at Selden Gallery, emerged from so much roaming around.

The show is drawn from a portfolio called "The Boxes" and consists of 14 archival digital prints that measure nearly 5 feet square each. All but one piece dates from last year. The individual works look like one giant image but actually consist of nine prints stick-pinned to the gallery wall.

The unpretentious presentation mirrors the seeming intent of the series - to deflate expectations about what it's like to visit a particular place, whether Manhattan or Berlin.

Most of us have visions of what it would be like to be in certain exotic locales such as Hong Kong. Chak suggests the reality is much different. Cities are losing their distinct character and are becoming more diverse all the time. Chinese restaurants and McDonald's are everywhere, for instance.

That's not a novel observation, but his way of getting it across makes it seem fresh.

Chak's method is to take lots of pictures wherever he goes, especially of windows. He has captured a wide range of window scenes set within facades,

illustrating to what extent even a portion of a facade can suggest about class, personality, nationality and ethnicity.

Each piece is a montage of those photos. He creates visual rhythms with these pictures, re-arranging them very large to thumbnail small. Often he arranges these facade shots in tight, horizontal rows so they resemble a hillside village on a sharply vertical incline.

Chak has said he sees the windows as people and the assemblage of windows as a community. Each piece can be seen as a portrait of a community in the process of becoming a world community.

The artist presents his work as a kind of faux evidence that the planet is morphing into one communal face.

That point might get a little upstaged by the mood of "The Boxes."

Chak is depicting mostly dreary, claustrophobic places few would want to call home. The compression of often filthy, ugly buildings makes you want to run to a park. The contrast of the lonely, hurried, homey city dwellers with the giant billboard portraits of seductive models is depressing.

Chak is continuing to work on "The Boxes." Last Friday, when his show opened at Selden Gallery, which is run by the city of Norfolk's Bureau of Cultural Affairs, he was seen out in the city shooting pictures for his next portrait of a homogenized city of the world.

if you go

What "The Boxes,"
archival digital prints by Chung "Fanky" Chak

Where Selden Gallery, inside Selden Arcade, 208 E. Main St., Norfolk

When Through Oct. 30; open 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sundays - an arcade security guard will let you in.

Cost Free admission; (757) 664-6880, www.theselden.com

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