



MICHELA NEGRINI  
[dip] contemporary art

**CAROLINA SANDRETTO  
WANG TONG**  
**The Architecture of Absence**  
Galleria Michela Negrini, Lugano

Exhibition: 06.02- 27.0 . 202

-

Michela Negrini is delighted to present  
The Architecture of Absence

This exhibition brings into dialogue the photographic practices of Carolina Sandretto (Italy, b. 1980) and Wang Tong (China b. 1967), with two bodies of works exploring cities and landscapes marked by absence. Though geographically and culturally distant, their visions converge on places shaped by abandonment, suspension, and transformation, where human presence is no longer visible yet remains deeply inscribed in the built environment. In both bodies of work, architecture and urban space become silent witnesses. Streets, rooms, and structures stand emptied of people, yet saturated with memory. The absence of the human figure does not signify emptiness; rather, it heightens a sense of latent life, allowing time itself to emerge as the central subject. These landscapes are not neutral backdrops, but active repositories of collective history, desire, and loss. The exhibition includes chairs, vases, cutlery, and wearable art.



### The exhibition

Together, the works of Sandretto and Wang Tong propose two distinct yet resonant approaches to abandonment and absence. One looks at what has been left behind, preserved or slowly eroded by time; the other examines what is continuously being built, dismantled, and reimagined.

In Svalbard, Sandretto photographs an entire mining city abandoned since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Left intact in an icy environment, the city functions as an open-air museum of time, where personal objects and domestic spaces bear witness to the passage of thousands of lives. In Antarctica, she documents the rare remnants of human activity still visible in former whaling settlements, where ruins stand in stark contrast to a pristine and protected landscape. Cuba, by contrast, is portrayed as a place where time seems to linger rather than progress: interiors filled with objects still in use, repaired and reused despite age and damage, reveal a different relationship to temporality—one shaped by scarcity, continuity, and resilience.

For Wang, the urban landscape becomes a metaphor for the Chinese condition itself—a space where history, ideology, and everyday life overlap. His photographs do not merely document change; they register its psychological and temporal weight, capturing specific moments within a broader mental and geographical map shaped by personal experience and national transformation.

In both cases, cities emerge as fragile constructs—spaces where human presence is implied rather than shown, and where architecture becomes the last visible trace of collective existence.



**Carolina Sandretto**

Carolina Sandretto (born 1981) is an Italian Photographer. With a background in both Not for profit Management and Photojournalism, Carolina explores themes such as passing of time, memory and abandonment. She works predominately with medium format analogue cameras and large format.

She published with Skira the book “Cines de Cuba” in 2017 and in 2019 her second book “Cuba. Vivir Con” with Silvana Editoriale. Her artist book “Internal Memories/External Memories” has been released in 2020. Her work has appeared on different publications and news outlets such as: BOMB Magazine, Flash Art, Atlas Obscura, Vogue Italy, La Stampa, Il Manifesto, Glamour Italy and others.

Through traditional techniques, the photographic process becomes a mental creative process, a path whose purpose is the image intended as a story. Her work has been largely exhibited in Italy, Mexico and the USA. The traveling exhibition All Things Left Behind has been presented in Switzerland, Italy and Thailand.

Her work is present in several private collections and has appeared on different publications and news outlets such as: BOMB Magazine, Flash Art, Atlas Obscura, Vogue Italy, Elle Decor, La Stampa, L.A. Times, Glamour, The Guardian, CNN Style, Artribune, Corriere della Sera, Lonely Planet, and others.

### **Wang Tong**

Chinese artist Wang Tong was born in 1967 in Jilin, China. He has been active in the field of photography since the early 1990s when he started to create some of the most challenging and visually-compelling bodies of work ever produced in China. For its detailed and accurate approach to both the conceptual and the technical aspects related to photography, Wang Tong's work has been extensively exhibited throughout China, as well as in Japan and Europe.

He explores photography with the accuracy of a philologist, while continuously expanding the scope of a genre which, for him, is a meta-language for investigating the complex liaison between the microcosm and the macrocosm, the real and the ideal, the historical and the daily. As an author of documentary images rooted in the keen observation of past history and contemporary reality as well as the tension between strong narrative elements, Wang Tong has devoted his career to portraying the abrupt changes that his mother country has undergone. He documents the construction and incessant renegotiation of China's identity in both the individual and collective senses. His photographic work is the prism through which we can view the various layers of Chinese history that are inevitably intertwined with the artist's personal experience. In Wang's oeuvre, these elements overlap with thrilling results, and each photograph reflects a specific moment in his mental and geographical topography.

He is also present in major Asian art collections. Wang Tong's work has been presented in solo and groups shows organized at: Galleria Carla Sozzani, 10 Corso Como, Milan (2005); Beijing Tokyo Art Projects, Beijing and Tokyo (2006); Fotografie Noorderlicht, Groningen (2008); Alessandria Video and Photography Biennale, Alessandria (2011); Ofoto Gallery, Shanghai (2012); Stavanger Museum, Stavanger, Norway (2013); Format International Photography Festival, Derby, UK (2014), among others.



Carolina Sandretto  
Pyramiden - London,  
from the series *All the things we left behind*,  
2016-2018  
Digital Print on alu dibond, museum glass  
cm 40 x 40 / cm 46,5 x 46,5 framed  
Ed 5 + 2 AP

MICHELA NEGRINI  
[dip] contemporary art



Wang Tong  
xinle hebei, 06.2011  
from the series forging cities,  
b&w photograph  
50x70 cm  
edition of 15, signed

MICHELA NEGRINI  
[dip] contemporary art

via dufour 3\_ 6900 lugano (switzerland)  
tel: +41 (0)91 921 17 17 mob: +41 (0)79 1732954  
info@michelanegrini.com  
www.michelanegrini.com

Visits: Tuesday-Sunday h.10-20.00  
(appointment only)

