

# When the Sunflowers Faded

## Taiwanese Identity in Times of Geopolitical Crisis

Exhibition at the Kampus Hybernská, Prague  
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Sunflowers – symbolizing years of struggle for Taiwanese democracy – have bloomed and faded, yielding millions of seeds that bear fruit. After the Sunflower Revolution, Taiwan increasingly distinguished itself from its powerful neighbor as an “Island of Freedom”. In addition to pursuing the democratic principles of self-government, the island of 23 million is not only witnessing economic growth but also a burgeoning sense of national unity and identity distinct from earlier generations that were more firmly linked to the Chinese origins of the island’s ruling elite and structured according to pro-Chinese linguistic and cultural sensibilities. However, this newfound sense of national identity is changing under the constant threat of the island’s annexation by communist China, either through legal and diplomatic pressure, or the fear of police appropriation or violent military action. Among the younger generation in particular, there is a growing awareness that the population of the island must pursue its own national aspirations rooted in a distinct Taiwanese identity.

How is a nation’s identity formed and transformed when confronted by threats of war and disinformation amidst a complicated and uncertain period in global politics and under the shadow of a neighbor that does not recognise its existence??

The exhibition “When the Sunflowers Faded” reflects on the fragility of Taiwan’s existence and brings together artists and writers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Czech Republic, who are the protagonists of the upcoming documentary film *The Island of Freedom*. These artists live in Taiwan, one of the most threatened places in the world today, on an island across the Taiwan Strait, where life appears peaceful, but this very island could become the spark that ignites another war. The works of the selected authors explore the divide between grasping national identity and resistance in a time of great political change and the likely rewriting of the current status quo, security guarantees, and decades of global peace. For those artists living in Taiwan, experience is particularly precarious: the island can appear peaceful but it could also be the flashpoint igniting a regional or global war.

Taiwanese political cartoonist (Stellina Chen) employs sharp criticism in her seemingly playful drawings and uses satire to question the power structures and narratives of major political figures. As a political cartoonist living between Taiwan and France, she both comments on the situation in Taiwan and uncompromisingly reflects on the complicated geopolitics of the contemporary world in her satirical cartoons.

(Kacey Wong) is a visual artist who has long worked at the intersection of sculpture, performance, and activism. His work transforms political experience into poetic yet radical gestures, from public performances in the streets of Hong Kong to installations that become scenes of civil resistance. After 2019, when a wave of protests against growing repression hit Hong Kong and the New Chinese Security Law was implemented, Wong left for Taiwan, where he continues to work as an ‘artist in exile’. His works address issues of freedom, identity, and collective memory, reflecting on how art can serve as a tool for political expression and personal survival, all the while seeking new ways to transform public space into a venue of shared imagination.

Czech photographer and visual artist (Karel Pícha) focuses on documenting political and social conflicts. He has been living and working in Taiwan for many years, capturing moments of civic engagement and everyday expressions of identity in the context of a threatened democracy. He photographs visits by top foreign politicians who support Taiwan as a sovereign nation, as well as major political events in Taiwan for global news agencies. His photographs connect the experience of Central Europe with the Asian context and show that the struggle for freedom is universal.

The exhibition “When the Sunflowers Faded” is accompanied by excerpts from the preface of a collection of dystopian essays, „The Testimonies Will Be Denied,” by Taiwanese writer and essayist (Chu Yu-hsun). His work combines personal stories with broader questions of history, memory, and national identity, as well as fractious, frightening utopian visions of a future Taiwan under the rule of the PRC.

The works of authors from the “Island of Freedom” express a distinctive perspective on Taiwanese identity shaped during the last 40 years of pursuing democratic principles under constant threat, burdened by the legacy of colonialism and the reality of global crisis. They remind us that the recognition of identity is not only a political act but also a deeply personal experience.

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