

RAG

RICHMOND ART GALLERY

*Greg Girard:  
Richmond/Kowloon*

April 18 – June 28, 2015



Greg Girard, *Mall Tai Chi*, 2014, Archival Pigment Print

School Art Program Teacher's Guide

**Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program**

7700 Minoru Gate, Richmond, BC, V6Y 1R9 Phone: 604-247-8300 Fax: 604-247-8301

[www.richmondartgallery.org](http://www.richmondartgallery.org)

## DEAR TEACHERS:

This guide has been developed for teachers to use as a classroom resource in relation to the **Greg Girard: Richmond/Kowloon** exhibition, which can be visited at the Gallery from April 18 – June 28, 2015.

This guide contains information about the exhibition and activities that will help you to prepare for and follow-up your visit to the Richmond Art Gallery. Engaging in the activities before and after your visit will reinforce ideas and processes explored in the exhibition, and provide continuity between the gallery visit and classroom.

To ensure accessibility, the activities require a minimum of materials and are adaptable to the needs of different grade levels. The guide also contains vocabulary and resource links.

The tour of the exhibition has three main goals:

- to introduce students to the work of Greg Girard and his artistic practice
- to explore the artist's individual photographs within their particular contexts
- to consider the meaning of and questions that arise from the artist's works.



# About the Exhibition

## Greg Girard: Richmond/Kowloon

*Greg Girard: Richmond/Kowloon* includes previously created but never exhibited work documenting Kowloon Walled City by Vancouver-based Canadian photographer Greg Girard, as well as a new body of photographic work documenting Richmond, BC. The exhibition includes colour photographs of new images taken in Richmond over the last two years, images of historic Kowloon taken between 1987 and 1992, and newer Kowloon photographs taken in the area where the Walled City stood before it was demolished in 1993. Created twenty years apart, Girard's images document the distinct social and physical features of the two communities while examining the relationships and networks that link them.



L-R: Greg Girard, *Northwest Facade*, 1987, and *Richmond View (Commercial Rooftops)*, 2014, Archival Pigment Print

## The Artist's Process

Invited by the Richmond Art Gallery to create a new body of work about Richmond, Girard spent two years exploring the city with his camera. He focused on the physical city and how it has changed since his early visits 30 years ago, as well as taking a more intimate look at the places where Richmond residents live and work.

*"In trying to photograph this new and changing territory I've drawn on my own experience having lived in other rapidly changing cities where one moves between the familiar and the unfamiliar on a daily basis. Much of the effort in creating this work was devoted to persuading people to open up their lives and homes and businesses, the decidedly non-virtual Richmond realities of both newcomers and multi-generation families (and those in between)..."*

Greg Girard, Artist Statement

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L-R: Greg Girard, *Children on Rooftop*, 1989, and *Roller Derby*, 2014, Archival Pigment Prints

This process of wandering the city and talking to people he meets in an effort to photograph them is similar to how he created the Kowloon Walled City series. He describes the process in an interview with *Fototazo* magazine in 2012:

*"I'm pretty straightforward if I want to photograph someone or some place. Using a camera on a tripod sort of gives away what you're up to anyway. I basically expect to have a tough time at the beginning and just hope it gets easier as time goes by, as people get used to me or bored with me. I spent five years photographing in the Kowloon Walled City. In the beginning, it was difficult; people were openly hostile. Things became easier after the Hong Kong government announced plans to demolish it. People understood that you were there because its days were numbered. Still, after five years, there were still some people who refused to allow me to photograph them or their shops or their homes."*

- <http://www.fototazo.com/2012/02/interview-greg-girard.html>

## Exhibition Themes

Girard's photographs look at the ways people adapt to their city; whether it is the high density and congestion of Asian cities like Kowloon, or the relative sprawl and openness of Richmond. The rapid transition from semi-rural to suburban to urban is of great interest to the artist, and his photographs document how these two communities have experienced and live with change.

In the past 25 years Richmond has undergone a dramatic physical and demographic transformation, a process of immigration and urbanization - much of it from Hong Kong and other cities in China and Asia. Transitioning from a rural community to a city of over 200,000, Richmond is experiencing the challenges and opportunities of urban growth.

Within the city of Hong Kong, the Walled City was a largely ungoverned, self-regulating settlement that housed over 35,000 residents within a single city block.

Prior to its demolition in 1993, Girard photographed it over a period of five years, culminating in what has become the most complete record of Kowloon Walled City. Individually viewed, the Richmond and Kowloon bodies of work document specific places and times - together they more deeply address issues of migration and its driving forces.



L-R: Greg Girard, *Southwest Corner*, 1987, and *Alley View #1*, 1989, Archival Pigment Prints

## Background: Kowloon Walled City

*"The Walled City was a kind of architectural touchstone in terms of what a city can be – unplanned, self-generated, unregulated."*

- Greg Girard

Kowloon Walled City is now known as a kind of historical accident. A former Qing dynasty fortress, it never fully came under control of the British colonial government in Hong Kong. As a result, its residents were free to build their dwellings as they wished, ignoring safety codes and regulations. Before its demolition in 1993, it constituted 300 interconnected and stacked buildings, in some areas as high as 14 storeys, forming a maze of hallways and alleys integrating residents and businesses that coexisted in the most densely populated place in the world.

*"Quite often houses were built by building onto the next building, punching out walls to use their staircases ... A lot of them didn't have access to air or open space, because they were enclosed in the center of the structure."*

- Greg Girard

By the early 1980s the city was notorious for high rates of criminal activity, and often viewed by outsiders as a dangerous place. Despite its reputation for crime and squalor, many of its inhabitants went about their lives in relative peace and were quite content to live within this independent community.

Although the city's crime rates started to decline in the late 1980s, both the British and Chinese authorities found the city to be increasingly unsanitary and announced plans to demolish the Walled City. In January 1987 the long eviction process of all its residents began, in preparation for the eventual demolition in 1992-93.

## About the Artist



**Greg Girard** (B. 1955) is a Canadian photographer who has spent more than 30 years photographing in Asia - living in Tokyo in the late 1970s, Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s, and Shanghai from 1998 until 2012. His work has examined the social and physical transformations in Asia, especially in its largest cities, for more than three decades.

Greg Girard's photographs have appeared in a wide range of internationally recognized magazines and journals such as National Geographic, Domus, Blueprint, TIME, Newsweek, Fortune, The New York Times and others.

He is the author of four books, three of which focus on cities in Asia. "Phantom Shanghai" (2007), with an introduction by novelist William Gibson, was cited by the Independent Newspaper (UK) as one of the top 10 photography books ever published. "City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City", first published in 1993, and reprinted in more than ten subsequent editions, is the authoritative record of Hong Kong's infamous Kowloon Walled City. "Hanoi Calling", published in 2010, is a meditation on the Vietnamese capital on the eve of its millennium anniversary. "In the Near Distance", also published in 2010, is a collection of his early work, made in Canada, the US and in Asia between 1972 and 1987.

His work is in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, The Art Gallery of Ontario, the Vancouver Art Gallery and other public and private collections.

He now lives and works in Vancouver, Canada, where he is engaged in a long-term project to document the city's working waterfront and examine its identity as a port. He is represented by Monte Clark Gallery, Vancouver.

### Want to know more?

**Greg Girard's Website:** <http://greggirard.com/>

**The Richmond Art Gallery's Interview with Greg Girard talking about the exhibition:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0K29C9kznlg>

# Before Your Visit

Greg Girard examines the ways in which people adapt to living in different city conditions, and the ways they change the shape of their cities over time. Students will be looking at images of two very different cities in this exhibition, from two different time periods: the Richmond we see today, and Kowloon Walled City the way it looked twenty-five years ago.

## Richmond: Continuity and Change

Give students some introductory background history about the City of Richmond's roots as a farming and fishing community, and look at some historical images of what Richmond looked like in the past. Photos of Richmond from the archives can be found here:

<https://www.historypin.org/channels/view/26288/#!/map/index/#!/geo:49.151713,-123.101984/zoom:12/>

Discuss the ways in which Richmond has changed since then, and ways it has stayed the same.

## Kowloon Walled City: Adaptability

Give students some introductory background history about Kowloon Walled City (see following information sheet and resources below). With no government, the citizens of Kowloon Walled city had to be very creative in adapting to their situation as they had no typical municipal services. Most citizens lived quite ordinary lives there, raising families and running businesses. Discuss with students what role the government plays in their community, such as police, building codes, health codes, schools, and utilities. Ask students to imagine what life would be like in a community without any government. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of living in such a place?

**Book:** *City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City*, Photographs by Greg Girard, Text by Ian Lambot, 1999.

**Web:** The Wall Street Journal's interactive website and documentary video on Kowloon Walled City includes images, interactive maps, video interviews with inhabitants, and historical information.

WSJ Interactive website: <http://projects.wsj.com/kwc/#chapter=intro>

WSJ Documentary video (17 minutes): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dj\\_8ucS3lMY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dj_8ucS3lMY)

**Please note:** there are references to drugs, gangs, and prostitution in some of this material, so preview it before sharing it with your class.

## Kowloon Walled City Information Sheet

Location: Kowloon, Hong Kong.

History: It was originally a fort built by the Chinese in 1810, which was later fortified with a wall around it. Over the years 1842-98, Hong Kong and nearby areas such as Kowloon were handed over to the British, however the walled city remained under Chinese control. During World War II, Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese, who dismantled the wall and much of the city to build a nearby airport. After the surrender of the Japanese, the Chinese reasserted control of Kowloon Walled city. It became an “island” controlled by China but surrounded by the British territory of Hong Kong. The area was flooded with over 2000 refugees seeking ways to leave China and enter Hong Kong. In 1948 the British attempted to drive the refugees out of the city, but after failing, decided to take a “hands-off” approach to all matters to do with the City. The city then grew organically without any organized government oversight or control.

The “city” was only the size of 1 city block (2.7 hectares), or four football fields, which was the size of the original fort.

It is estimated that between 30,000-50,000 people lived there, in 300 interconnected buildings. It had the highest **population density** of any place on earth.

Because there was no government enforcement by either the Chinese or the British, the city essentially had no rules. The buildings were built without the need to follow building codes or safety rules. Because there was no police enforcement, criminal gangs, called Triads, moved into the city.

It was nicknamed the City of Darkness, because of the lack of sunshine. Because the buildings were so close together, many alleys and buildings were completely enclosed and had no access to light or air from the outside. In fact, it was so dark that it was illuminated 24 hours a day by fluorescent lamps.

Apartments were small and crowded, as a family commonly shared a living space of only 250 square feet (23 sqm).

It is estimated that inside the city walls there were about 150 shops, 87 dentists, 63 doctors and over 550 small manufacturers. The city was attractive to businesses as there was no government oversight, taxes, or regulations.

Despite the crime and the overcrowding, most residents led peaceful, regular lives.

In 1991-2 all the residents and businesses were evicted, and in 1993 the city was demolished. The residents were paid compensation, but had no choice in eviction, and some forcibly removed. The site is now a large park, which contains relics and a few restored buildings from the original city.



## After Your Visit

Before visiting Kowloon Walled City, Greg Girard knew it only by its reputation as a dangerous place filled with illegal activity. But when he explored it for himself, he discovered a vibrant community of people living quite ordinary lives despite their extraordinary living conditions.

Like many artists, Greg Girard's artistic process starts with observation. He does not know what he is going to photograph ahead of time. Instead, he spends a great deal of time walking around to discover a place, talking to the people he meets there, learning their stories, and then photographing what he finds. By doing this, he allows viewers to see places in new ways, and is able to reveal aspects of a place that people who live there may have never observed themselves.

Review with students their observations about Richmond from Greg Girard's photographs. What aspects of Richmond did they expect to see and were missing? What did they see that was unexpected or surprising? What kind of story is Greg Girard telling about Richmond? About Kowloon? Ask students to imagine if they were asked to photograph their community, what they would choose to photograph. What would they want people who had never visited their community to know, or see?

### Activity: The story behind the Image

Ask students to choose a photo from the exhibition, and write a story about it. Encourage students to look closely at the images, and to draw specific details from the pictures to use their story. Kowloon images can be found on Greg Girard's website <http://greggirard.com/work/kowloon-walled-city--13> and some of the Richmond images can be seen in the video interview with Greg Girard on You Tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0K29C9kznlg>.

### Activity: Discover your community through photography

Choose an area, such as a neighborhood or your school to observe as a class. Assign a period of time such as a week for them to observe the area on their own, and record what they see in photographs. Encourage students to try:

- Looking at different times of day
- Changing their point of view by observing from low down or high up
- Looking at things from far away or up close

Once the observation is done, have students assemble their photos, and choose one each to create a class exhibition on the chosen area. To accompany each photo, older students can write about what they photographed and what it reveals about the chosen area, and why they chose to photograph it.

Looking at all the photos as a group, discuss what everyone discovered about your chosen area. Did the process of observation change how they viewed the area, or change the types of things they focussed on to photograph? As a whole, what story do the photos tell about the area? What impression would someone who had never visited before get about this place from these images?

## Resources

**Web:** Using Digital Cameras in the class room, and photo lesson plans:

<http://www.wacona.com/digicam/digicam.html>

<http://terpconnect.umd.edu/~toh/image/DigitalCameraUses.htm>

[http://www.hardin.k12.ky.us/res\\_techn/TEC/digitalcamera/primary.htm](http://www.hardin.k12.ky.us/res_techn/TEC/digitalcamera/primary.htm)

### Books:

Bidner, Jenni. *The Kid's Guide to Digital Photography*. Lark Books, 2004.

Ebert, Michael & Abend, Sandra. *Photography for Kids!*. Rockynook, 2011.

Friedman, Debra. *Picture This: Fun Photography and Crafts*. Kids Can Press, 2003.

# Vocabulary

## **Archival Pigment Print**

A photographic print made with high quality pigment ink and papers so that the print depicts the colours of the photograph as accurately as possible. The ink and paper is also durable and stable, resistant to fading and environmental effects (such as light and humidity) to ensure that the print will last for a long time.

## **Contemporary Art**

Artwork that is produced in this current time, generally considered to be artworks made from 1970 to the present. Contemporary art is a very broad term, including artworks made in almost any medium and incorporating many different themes and ideas.

## **Documentary**

A work such as a film or video presenting political, social, or historical subject matter in a factual and informative manner.

## **Domesticity**

Domestic activities; relating to home life or the family.

## **Photography**

Photography is the science, art and practice of creating durable images by recording light either electronically by means of an image sensor (such as in a digital camera), or chemically by means of a light-sensitive material such as photographic film.

## **Photography as Art**

Fine art photography is defined as a picture that is taken with a creative vision by the photographer who is an artist. It refers to a photograph whose purpose is more than just mere representation, and attempts to go beyond realism. Successful artistic photography most often conveys something personal that the photographer wishes to express, while at the same time expressing themes or ideas.

## **Population**

The total number of people living in a specific area, such as a city, a country, district, or region. The World Population is the total number of people living in the world today.

## **Population Density**

The number of individuals occupying an area in relation to the size of that area. The formula for figuring out population density:  
$$\text{number of people} \div \text{the area they occupy} = \text{population density}$$

## **Subject**

In artwork, the subject is what the artist has chosen to paint, draw, sculpt, or photograph.

## Upcoming Events

### Curse of the Livable City: Panel Discussion

**Saturday, April 25, 2:00-3:30pm**

Join us for a discussion on the changing cityscape, led by Facilitator Leslie Van Duzer, Professor and Director at the School of Architecture & Landscape Architecture, UBC. Panelists: Greg Girard, Photographer; Bing Thom, Principal, Bing Thom Architects; Glenn Deer, Assistant Professor of English & Associate Editor of Canadian Literature, Dept. of English, UBC; Rufina Wu, Architect AIBC

### Artist Talk with Greg Girard

**Saturday, May 23, 2:00-3:00pm**

**Richmond Cultural Centre Performance Hall – 7700 Minoru Gate**

The artist will present an illustrated talk about his career. Co-sponsored by the Contemporary Art Society of Vancouver.

### ART+TEA+TALK

**Wednesday, May 27, 10:30-11:30am**

Free tour and discussion of the exhibition with Gallery Curator Nan Capogna. Light refreshments provided.

### Doors Open Richmond

**June 6 & 7**

Free cultural events throughout the city. [www.richmond.ca/culture/about/events/doorsopen](http://www.richmond.ca/culture/about/events/doorsopen)

## Gallery Programs

### Family Sunday

**Drop-in 1:00 – 4:00 pm, Free**

Families are invited to participate in various exhibition-related art projects and activities on the fourth Sunday of each month. Stories, music, art...activities vary from month to month! It's free, thanks to the RBC Foundation.

**2015 Schedule:** Apr 26 • May 24 • June 28 • July 26 • Aug 23 • Sept 27 • Oct 25 • Nov 22

### Drop-in Drawing for Adults

**Drop-in 6:00 – 9:00 pm, Free**

Drop-in the Art Gallery and draw inspiration from original works of art! Drop-in Drawing for Adults is a program designed to bring out the social side of sketching. Materials provided, but you are welcome to bring your own sketchbooks. No previous drawing experience required! For ages 16+

**2015 Schedule:** May 7 • June 4 • Aug 6 • Oct 1 • Nov 5 • Dec 3

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Generous support for the School Art Program provided by  
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