

# From Photography to Music

*A creative dialogue between  
David Clarke & Chan Hing-yan*

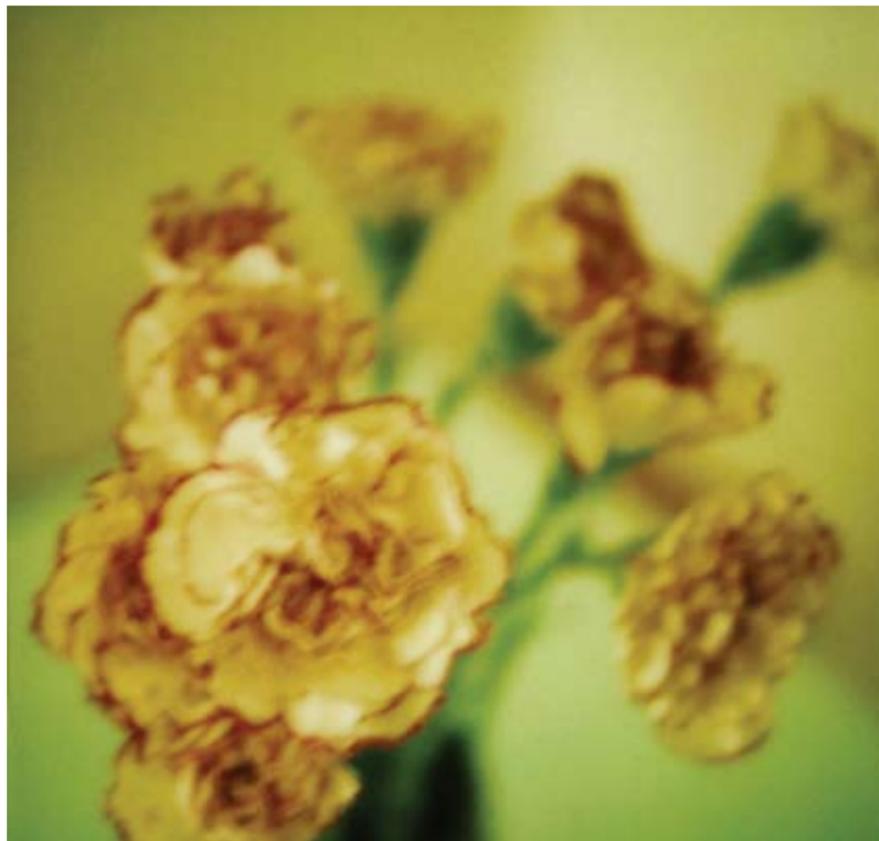
## David Clarke: *Portraits of Things*

This booklet and accompanying CD document a creative dialogue between myself and composer Chan Hing-yan.

2. This dialogue, which saw Hing-yan respond to a distinct body of photographic work I had produced by writing the musical composition *Adieu Sequence*, also found expression in a photography exhibition at the University of Hong Kong's University Museum and Art Gallery in Autumn 2013 during which this new piece of music was presented in both live and recorded forms. In the present short text I offer some background concerning my own contribution to this dialogue between visual art and music, to accompany the illustrations of several

of the photographic works themselves which can be found elsewhere in the booklet. Hing-yan and I hope that by putting a recording of his music and printed reproductions of my images together in this way we can create a more permanent documentation of our artistic collaboration than a temporary exhibition and live performance permits.

My contribution to this dialogue is a series of photographic images depicting flowers and fruit, to which I have given the collective title *Portraits of Things*. These images were originally generated using Polaroid instant film, with the resultant photos then being scanned at high resolution and printed at a larger scale as giclée (high quality ink-jet) prints on a suitable artist paper. No digital



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manipulation took place after scanning: the images that were printed were simply records of the impact on film chemicals of whatever light was allowed through the lens during exposure.

Many of the images are of single flowers or pieces of fruit, although sometimes groups also become the subject. Often the same subject will reappear in more than one image. In the case of a grouping of fruit or flowers there may have been a change in arrangement from one image to the next in the sequence, but in the case of single fruits or flowers the changes may be more to do with alterations in lighting effect or exposure. I have manipulated effects of light quite freely, using various combinations of both natural

and artificial light (with the latter both warm and cool), and have often played with low light effects. All photographs were taken indoors.

Although these works clearly fall into the category of still life, I have also come to think of myself as making portraits of the individual fruits or flowers I have photographed. Each image may only reveal one facet of its subject's character, but over time a richer understanding can emerge, even if there is never a moment of closure or mastery.

One of my interests in using Polaroid instant film for this project was the sense I had of it as being a medium that was coming to the end of its life. A whole visual world with its own distinctive properties that Polaroid instant film had



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allowed to come into being was on the verge of disappearance, and thus it seemed the right time to engage with it. In fact that end came a little sooner than I had expected: even while I was working on the project Polaroid announced the termination of its instant film production and the remaining stock rapidly disappeared from store shelves. This event in 2008 created a natural end point for the project as my own small supply was used up, and made each individual exposure from then on an event of some significance. It is to this sense of a medium vanishing that Hingyan also responds in *Adieu Sequence*.

The camera I had been using for the project was the classic SX-70 model, and Polaroid had already stopped producing film specifically for it a few years

previously, so I was employing 600 film instead. I had deliberately avoided making any adjustments to accommodate this faster film, however, and had instead chosen to work with the effects produced by the disjuncture between film and camera. I like to utilize artifacts of the photographic process as aesthetic factors, and made deliberate use of over-exposure and of camera movement in these images where they were appropriate to my aims. Being interested in the way a newly-exposed Polaroid instant photo gradually develops before one's eyes, I sometimes also produced images by using another camera to capture visually interesting moments in that process which would be lost by the time it was complete.

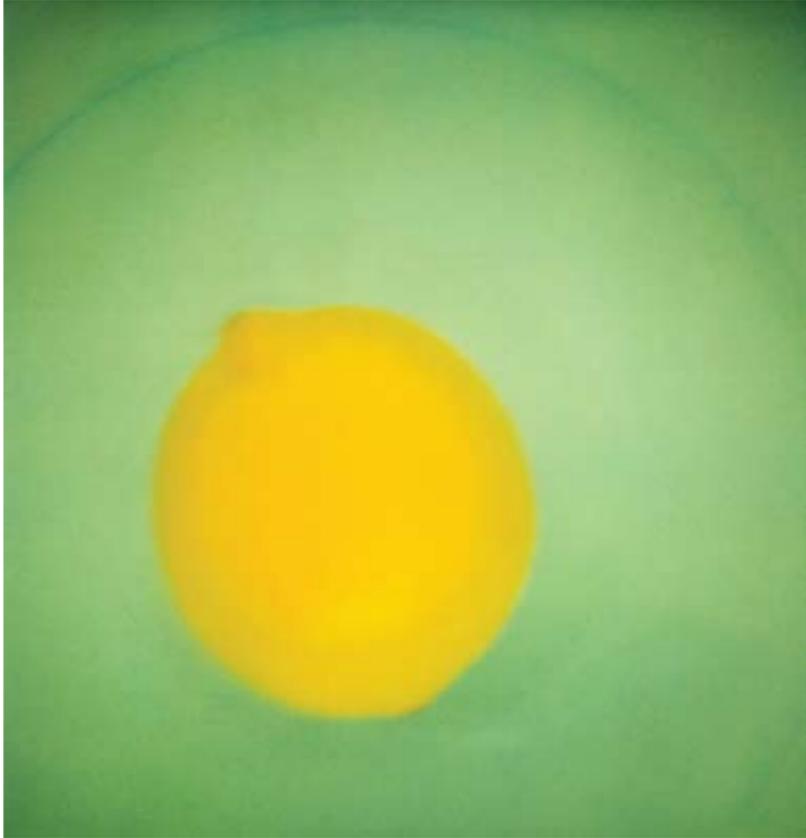
*David Clarke*



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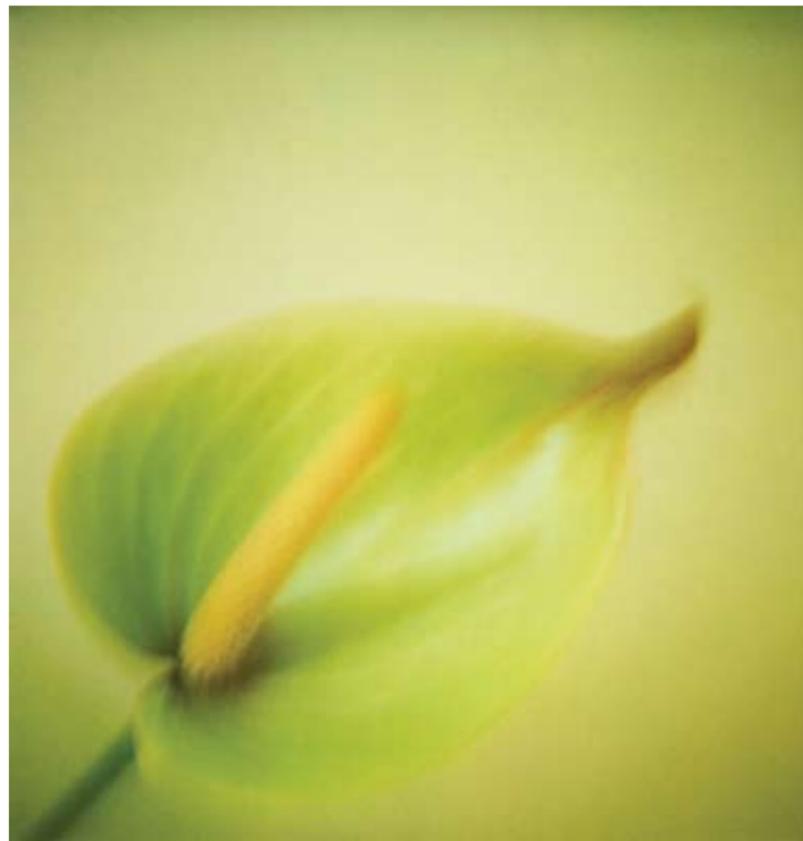


## Chan Hing-yan: *Adieu Sequence*

16. *Adieu Sequence* is a musical sketch inspired by David Clarke's *Portraits of Things*, a series of photographic images originally taken using Polaroid instant film. Despite its relative brevity, the piece has a gestation period much longer than I expected. While I have seldom used visual arts to explain my music, when David first showed me the images in early 2011, I was instantly captivated by their deliberate blandness, and was very much enticed by the idea of bidding a musical farewell to a vanishing medium. Within the 18 months thereafter, a few attempts to work on

the composition were interrupted by a chain of time-sensitive projects. Among the many drafts produced in this period include a close-to-finished suite in seven short movements, each of which pays homage to a compositional strategy much disdained by most contemporary composers. Not until the early summer of 2013 when the University Museum had confirmed putting up the exhibition did I eventually decide to discard all previous drafts and start all over again.

As in several of my other works composed after 1996, the musical fabric of *Adieu Sequence* results largely from the elaboration of tiny cells into a sort of mosaic design. This time-hallowed



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technique seems to function in much new music, irrespective of style, as a primary structural *modus*. The result is a sonic incantation cast in a simple two-part design framed ritually by four strokes of Tibetan finger cymbals. In the first half, the *sheng* (Chinese mouth-organ) and the vibraphone together create a web of delicate dissonances, onto which three viola phrases are superimposed, with the last one bringing to a brief climactic apogee. The *sheng* then slowly walks off stage while continuing its sparse and tenuous chords. The structural downbeat comes in the second half of the piece when fragments of Chopin's *Étude* Op. 10, No. 3 (nicknamed "Farewell"), performed

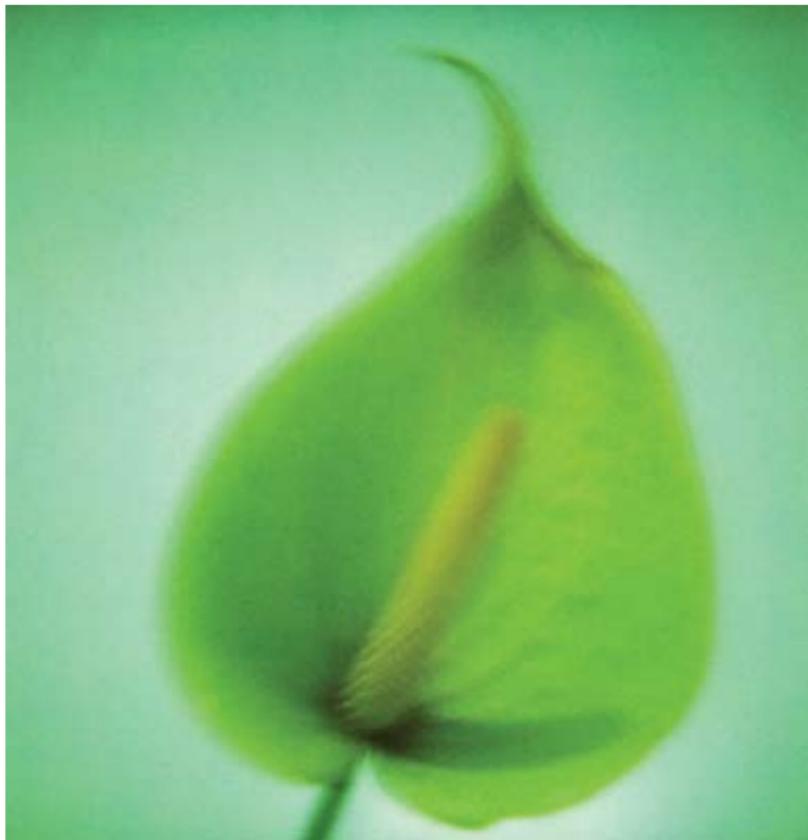
by the onstage viola and vibraphone, are in dialogue with the offstage *sheng* and gradually segue into a tranquil close. In such manner, the Chopin quotation and the theatrical gesture of the *sheng*'s processional recall the concluding pages of Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony.

*Chan Hing-yan*



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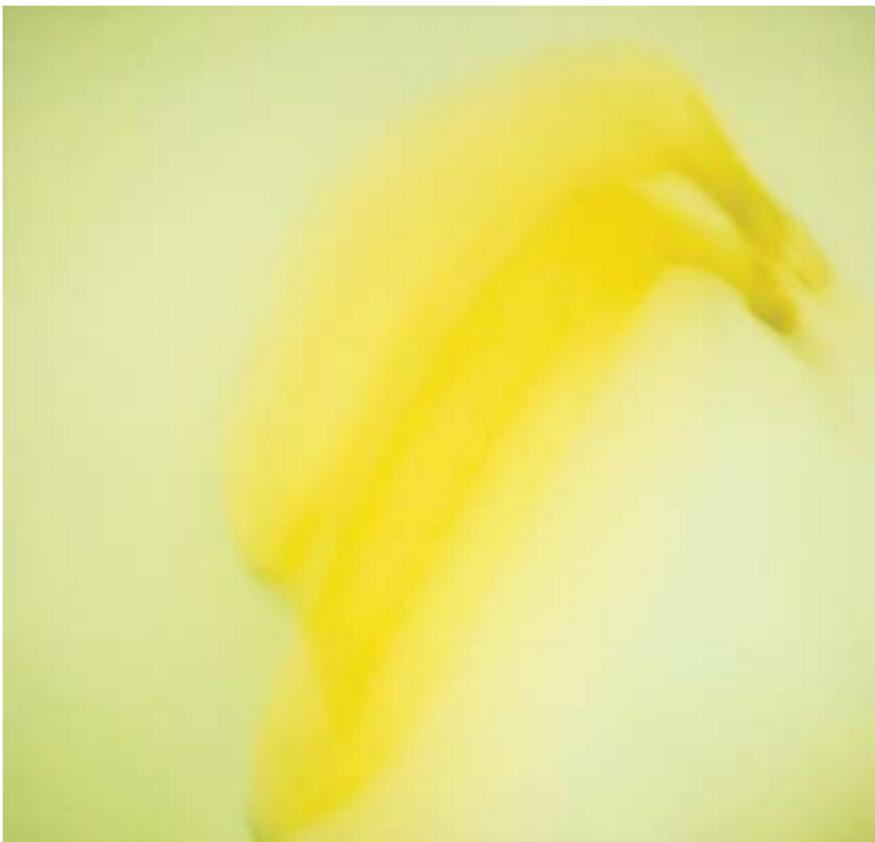
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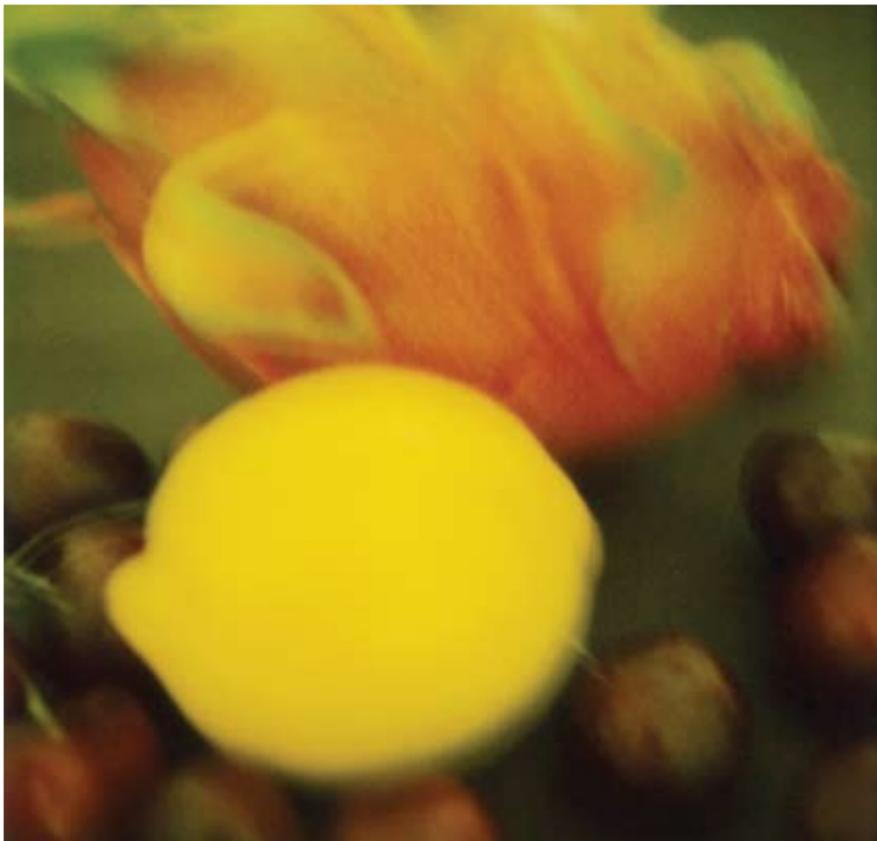
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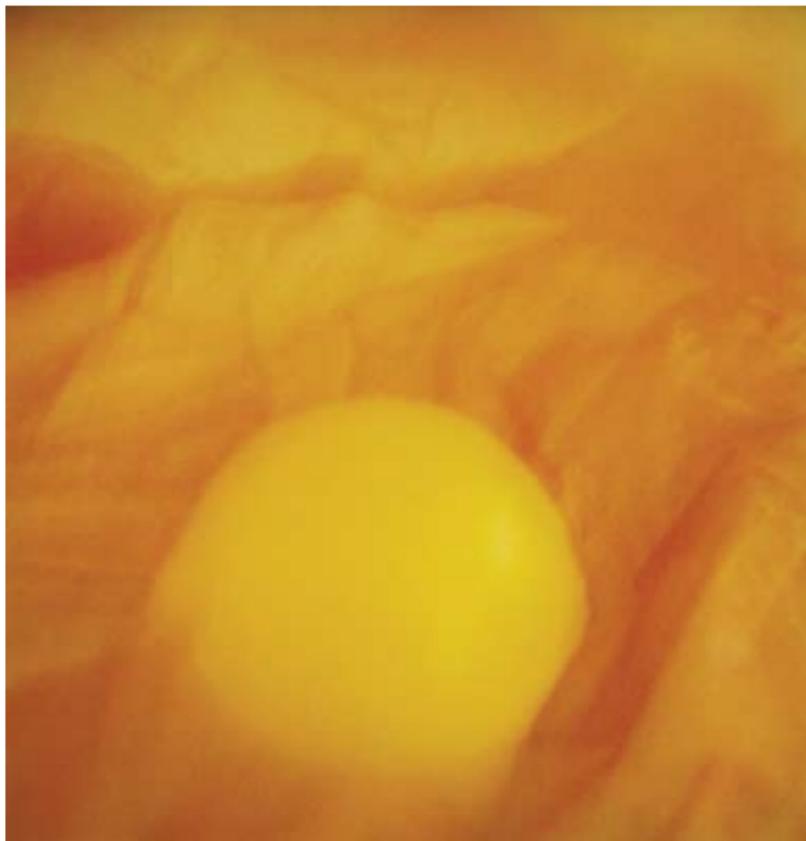
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**Chan Hing-yan:**  
*Adieu Sequence*

Loo Sze-wang (sheng)

Elvis Chan (viola)

Deborah Waugh (percussion)

Total time: 8:08

Produced by Chan Hing-yan

Recorded and Engineered by Chris Tam

Recorded at Electroacoustic Music Studio,

Department of Music, University of Hong

Kong, 5 Oct 2013

Score, recorded music and composer's  
statement © Chan Hing-yan 2013

Photographic images and artist's statement  
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Design by Kees van Es (Mediabox Productions)

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