

SITTING ON THE WALL

BY WENG FEN



This unique photography series by Weng Fen is a study in transition and divergence. Sprawling vistas of soaring skyscrapers, concrete buildings and jewel-toned skies form the background—cityscapes of China’s Haikou, Shenzhen and Shanghai. Strategically placed at the front of the frame is a seemingly unassuming schoolgirl surveying this hyper-realistic scene.

The composition is a reference to German painter Casper David Friedrich. This artist placed the human figure in the foreground of his canvases to illustrate the significant connection between man’s spirituality and the latent sublimity of the land. He, like his

Romantic contemporaries, exalted the natural world. But if Friedrich’s protagonist revels in the possibility of the mystical unknown, Fen’s schoolgirl expresses reservation; one leg over the wall, the other ready to turn in retreat. “Sitting on the Wall” might be more aptly titled “Straddling the Fence”; the girl on the concrete divider is perched hesitantly, ambivalent about this futuristic metropolis. As China goes through a period of transition and change, Fen beautifully illustrates the poetic unease of putting one’s best foot forward and taking a leap into the future.

—STEPHANIE GIBSON