I think I’m not just being nostalgic. I don’t go and shoot in every old building.

The landscape photography of Wong Wo-bik is bound to induce a cogent sense of nostalgia, which is a sentiment she doesn’t really share. “Not at all,” says the veteran photographer briskly when asked if her signature photos of old buildings — many of which have since been demolished — represent some kind of a historical mission. “Sorry about that,” she reacts, unprompted, to her own deadpan answer, before adding: “When I took the photos, I just felt that I should preserve them [on film]. They’re really beautiful.”

It would be an understatement to say that Wong, one of Hong Kong’s most recognised photographers, has been under-exhibited; it is partly a consequence of her long-time position working as an arts administrator in the government and partly — you get the impression — that she’s simply in no rush to show them to the world. In fact, when we meet for this interview on a weekday afternoon, Wong does casually speak of the ‘tens of thousands’ of photos that she has taken over the years, but never had a chance to take a look at.

For those who want a glimpse of history (in every sense of the word), a tip of this iceberg is being showcased at Wong’s current exhibition, titled Memory and Fiction, which includes several of her unpublished works dating back to the 1980s.

Would you consider your work a form of nostalgia? No. I think I’m not just being nostalgic. I don’t go and shoot in every old building. Take the Central Market as an example — I’ve been inside for some projects I was working on, but I had no interest at all to shoot there. The only reason I was carrying a camera there was for documentation purposes. That building is so ugly! On the other hand, I did actively go and visit abandoned buildings that my students told me about, such as Eu Tong-sen’s old mansions, which I did extra researches on. I really like to research about the old buildings. A few friends from abroad recently remarked on how lucky I was to be able to capture these buildings before they were torn down.

As an artist, how do you fit into the context of architecture photography? You know, the proper architectural photographers will always set their cameras straight, which is something I never did. I didn’t set out to [deviate from the norm], but I do feel that I’ve been capturing the best angles. I also like to include flaws in my works. You can easily notice that I only set up two lights [for some of my shoots]. These flaws have become a special element of my work.

Why do you prefer doing landscape to portrait photography? I’ve also done some portraits; it depends on the occasions. My portraits are more of the alternative type, though. For example, a friend of mine once asked me to shoot a set of wedding photos for her and I replied that I wouldn’t do any proper portraits. I asked her: ‘can your husband throw you up into the air?’ [Laughs] I would do that type of photo, but she’s too heavy for that.

Have you ever exhibited your portraits? No, never. [Pauses] Ah, maybe one.

Do you remember the earliest photos you ever took? It was in my undergraduate years at [the] Columbus [College of Art and Design,] Ohio. I took a photography course, equipped with only a Minolta standard-lens camera. I had to imitate wide angle, telephoto and other stuff with it. The most memorable part was the criticism session of the course. I was criticised like mad after taking some photos of the water tanks on the rooftops — I mean, I found them really cute as I’ve never seen them in Hong Kong — and my classmates kept on interrogating me about the meanings of those photos! I’ve forgotten how I fought back but luckily I didn’t cry on the spot. [Laughs]
Museums & Major Spaces

Arts Centre
* Vision of Nature: Lost & Found in Asian Contemporary Art Curated by Juno Mak (director of the Tate Modern Art Museum), this group exhibition explores the theme of nature through the works of eight artists from across Asia. Until Jan 29.

Cattle Depot Artist Village
1a Space, Unit 14, 63 Ma Tau Kok Rd, To Kwa Wan, 2529 0087; www.ooneaspace.org.hk. Tue-Sun 11am-7pm.
* One Suitcase Per Person A joint exhibition by Chinese artists of three ‘generations’, David Diao, Ken Lum and Hiram To, who began making art between 1900s and 1980s, and whose practices span Abstract Modernism, Conceptual and Post-conceptualism. Until Jan 31.

Heritage Museum
1 Man Lam Rd, Sha Tin, 2180 8188; heritagemuseum.gov.hk. Mon, Wed-Sat 10am-6pm, Sun 10am-7pm.
Imprint of the Heart: Artistic Journey of Huang Xinbo As a homage to the modern Chinese woodcut pioneer, the exhibition showcases Huang’s (1916-1980) works from 1930 to 1980, including block prints, oil paintings, artefacts from the Renjian Art Society and other invaluable items. Until Feb 27.

Museum of Art
10 Salisbury Rd, Tsim Sha Tsui, 2721 0116; hk.art.museum. Mon-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat 10am-8pm.
* Wu Guanzhong: Painting – Dance – Music The exhibition showcases more than 20 works by the respected Chinese artist in the museum collection, including the celebrated trilogy, namely Two Swallows, Former Residence of Qia Jin and Reminiscence of Jiangnan. Until Apr 15.

Run Run Shaw Creative Media Centre
18 Tai Hong Avenue, Kwoloon Tong, 3442 6553; www.cityu.edu.hk/cmc. Mon-Sat noon-8pm.
The Burning Edge: Making space, activating form As a dialogue between the centre’s architecture and its appropriation, this group exhibition casts a critical gaze on strategies of experience and activation by inviting faculty members of School of Creative Media to construct human networks within the building. Until Apr 30.

White Walls Have Ears The exhibition showcases a range of sonic art works from several Hong Kong artists, including Leung Chi-wa, Edwin Lo, Cédric Maridet, Kingsley Ng, Anthony Yeung and Samson Young. Until Apr 30.

Galleries

10 Chancery Lane Gallery
10 Chancery Ln, Central, 2810 0065; www.10chancerylanegallery.com. Tue-Sat 10am-6pm.
* Forces Carol Lee, Ken Matsubara, Lindy Lee, William Furniss and Xiao Lu play on the idea of the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal and water). Until Feb 8.

2P Contemporary Art
Shop 5, G/F, Poga Bldg, 6-20 Po Tuck St, Sai Ying Pun, 2803 2151; 2p-gallery.com. Mon-Sat 10am-7pm.
* Associated Hong Kong-born, Toronto-based artist Will Kwan takes a critical view of the visual and material culture of globalisation in his first solo show in Hong Kong. Until Feb 26.

Amelia Johnson Contemporary
6-10 Sheung Wan St, Central, 2548 2286; www.ameliahk.com. Tue-Sat 10.30am-6.30pm.
* Doubledouble As the first part of The Third Eye Project, Barry Jacques’s video projection work attempts to capture some of the frenzied activity that takes place daily in the urban landscape of Hong Kong. Until Feb 4.

Blindspot Gallery
24-26A, Aberdeen St, Central, 2517 6258; www.blindspotgallery.com. Tue-Sat 11am-7pm.
* Memory and Fiction This retrospective exhibition showcases selected works by Hong Kong photographer Wong Wo-bik, including photographs of Hong Kong historical and notable landmarks that dated from the 1980s. Until Feb 4 See left.