



12 June, 2011

Once Upon a Time...

Artists	:	Cao Xiaodong, Chen Jiagang, He Congyue, Liu Zheng, Miao Xiaochun, Zhao Yuzhong
Curator	:	Fang Lei
Exhibition Date	:	16 June – 31 July 2011
Opening Cocktail	:	6 – 8 pm, Thursday 16 June, 2011
Venue	:	Contemporary by Angela Li G/F, 90-92 Hollywood Road, Central, Hong Kong
Website	:	http://www.cbal.com.hk

Contemporary by Angela Li is proud to present "Once Upon a Time...", a photography and video exhibition of works by six Chinese Contemporary artists. These lens-based artists explore the notion of "truth" in our daily encounters by way of using different style of photography and video.

Extracts from curator Fang Lei:

Perhaps the title of this exhibition might hint at being "nosy". In describing his perceptions of creativity, artist Liu Zheng said, "I have come to feel that reality is the greatest impediment to my creations, and breaking out of reality is now my strongest impulse." Likewise, "breaking out of reality" is also my greatest impulse in devising this exhibition.

We are all audiences in this era, and for audiences like ourselves, our everyday experiences are truths, but truths are not interesting. They are either dreary, sapping or saddening. Being nosy has become a method for relieving the pressures of reality, so that reality can become joyful, light and even hopeful. In that case, let's tell some stories. Everyone likes to hear stories, and there is nothing wrong with being a bit "nosy".

These stories, narrated through the medium of photography, after makeup, deduction and technological alteration, seem to no longer bear resemblance to the original events, and have discarded with the "evidentiary" aspect of photography. They are not real, so please do not treat them as such. But if you see something within them, then you have taken part in this "nosy" trip.

Selected Works of The Exhibition



Chen Jiagang

The virtual scenes created by show flats in new Chinese real estate developments form the images in Chen Jiagang's latest Show Flats series. Within an individualised context packed with beautiful women, Chen has created a series of fragments from a grand narrative of luxuriant life. In real life, show flats of various shapes, sizes and styles populate the dreams of middle class Chinese families. In Chen's work, the show flats have been overly distilled and extrapolated into heavenly abodes suitable only to rich and powerful families and hoards of extravagant guests, homes for showing off and spaces for revelry. It appears that the show flats Chen Jiagang has selected are nothing more than artificial scenery, mere backdrops to living dramas or theme parks that are suitable only for performance rather than actual living. The scenes of revelry in these show flats radiate a genuine air, silently intervening in the lives of the people while simultaneously maintaining a distance from their everyday experience. The dramatic elements that permeate Chen's images, with their instantaneous shifts between reality and fantasy and their struggles between spirit and flesh, are a vivid reflection of the pathologies of Chinese society in a state of transition. The artist's keen sense of critique has turned the show flats of the world into visual resources, which in turn has made them small and insignificant.



Chen Jiagang, Show Flat No.42, 100 x 166 cm, photograph



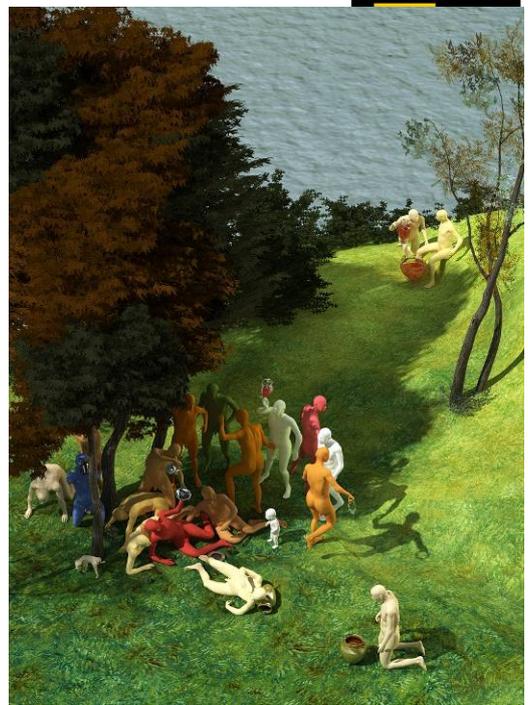
Chen Jiagang, Show Flat No.2, 100 x 166 cm, photograph

Miao Xiaochun

Showing in the exhibition are two latest video works and two large scale photographs by Miao Xiaochun. In *The Last Judgment*, Miao has successfully applied 3D technology to a two dimensional scene to transform it into a three dimensional setting. While altering the traditional imaging method, he is also providing a famous historical artwork with new interpretation and meaning. This work has been well-received in the rest of the world for taking a meaningful step towards new possibilities in art.

Miao Xiaochun believes that the truthful documentation of the objective world is not limited to the mere moments that the selective observer chooses to press the shutter. He feels

that real truthful documentation requires shooting and
Photograph



Miao Xiaochun, H2O Bacchanal, 205 x 150 cm,

documenting at all places and all times, and encompasses even the various smells of the scenes, so truly objective observation is impossible and therefore meaningless. Traditional and digital photography are both acts of the photographer making subjective choices of the objective. The selection of digital photography and computer manipulation to present scenes and people is just another method of subjective behaviour. Photographs rendered with digital methods may even be closer to the real truth, because they can present the passage of time or a deeper sense of space. Miao Xiaochun has provided us with a direct and unique perspective, catalyzing a cosmic dialogue between past and present.

Liu Zheng

Liu Zheng says, "I have a very sentimental side. If you are busy all your life and have never engaged in art, then you should give life another try. Through creativity, freedom and sharing, one day someone will share my art with me. My love is not photography or even cameras; it is the freedom that exists within them."



Liu Zheng uses the techniques of a cinematic director to blur the lines of reality and history. Through meditative thought, he has found his own dramatic narrative method. He says, "I think that people's imaginations should have wings, totally unburdened... I am obsessed with makeup. When someone puts on makeup, the entire meaning becomes different. People put on makeup to get married, they put it on when they get on stage, and they put it on when they are off stage..." Liu Zheng restores his concepts and abstractions within miniaturised narratives. Standing in the critic's position, facing the coarse and callous, facing satire and ridicule, facing inhibition and pathology, facing a daunting landscape, we must make our own judgments. We cannot completely welcome the

amplitude of the image.

Liu Zheng, Mu Lan Serves in the Army, 150 x 200 cm, Photograph



Cao Xiaodong

Cao Xiaodong infused images of himself into hundreds of old photographs, recomposing scenes and objects of each image while providing textural references in order to render a personal photography archive of a faux militant from the Republican era. These images consist of his family history, his growing up, social unrest, emotional turmoil, vicissitude of history, military coup and other visual phenomenon, revealing a passion and fascination with project, or even attempt to reconstruct a historical narrative with one's own narrative. Or, it could also be considered as an odyssey of his personal history. Although Cao has choreographed a linear timeline, however, there is no apparent logical relationship among the objects referencing each other. The interchangeable roles of the main character make the narrative lucid at times, ambiguous otherwise. Moreover the fragmented representation of information underlines the typical attitude towards history and reality in this era. Misery and hardship of the Anti-Japanese war is portrayed with the walk-in-the-park type of victory, the brutal battles between the two parties and its gloomy outcome is comforted with an imagined reconciliation. Such representation reveals the artist's inner conflicts on dealing with the black hole of historical memories, instead chooses to seek relief through one's own amusement. Meanwhile, Cao has provided a spiritual therapy false evidence for those who fantasize history. Contrary to Susan Sontag's photographs as evidence, these works tests the effectiveness of false evidence.

Moreover, the artist's grandfather was a military officer of the Huangpu Military Academy, who took his own life on a desolate island. The photographs left behind from his grandfather have been burnt during the Cultural Revolution. Therefore, this fabricated photo album also reveals the artist's fill-in-the-blank of his family memories and psychological compensation through images. Memories are often forcibly rewritten. Perhaps one's individual recount is a channel to compensate for the collective loss.



He Chongyue



He Chongyue's latest works present an aging rural population. In the Chinese countryside today, aside from some young children and a few youths, the vast majority of people are the elderly. The series is called Aging Population, but he also refers to it as the "Last Stop." The artist views his new work as a direct extension of his work on family planning policies. One reason for the exodus of young people (some who only leave for temporary jobs) is the hope of finding higher income in the cities. The "poor, simple life of the countryside" is also a driving force behind this exodus of youth. In the past, this state of affairs was looked down upon in the West as the stupidity of peasants, and the countryside, seen as unfit for habitation, was widely abandoned. Eventually, beginning in the 1980s, people began to gradually move back to the countryside, at least from the more prosperous cities. The result of the large-scale "deletion" of children (through family planning policies) was that though China's dramatic population explosion was halted, the "fate" of the traditional rural way of life was sealed. He Chongyue's photography uses simple yet moving forms to present this ossification, because what it presents us with is a collective, one that protects itself with a massive, awe-inspiring construct. This collective sticks together like a corporation or a family, but if we take

a closer look, we see a hidden allusion about this subject: there will not be a next generation as the population has reached the last stop!



Zhao Yuzhong

Zhao Yuzhong takes images of people around her and selectively cuts them out, creating small collages. These people end up tightly packed together in their own little worlds. In this world, the people have different facial expressions, but since they are facing a conscious lens, these specific portraits lean towards different thoughts. If each person is his own world, then how many worlds are there here? How many understandings of the world are there? The viewer is easily pulled into the situation and just as easily pulled into a certain sentiment, even hope.

All Images: Courtesy of *Contemporary by Angela Li* & the Artists.

