

ANNOUNCEMENT:

Video – REAL
Recent Chinese Video Art

Curator: Thomas J. Berghuis

Artists: Wang Jianwei, Zhao Liang, Qiu Zhijie, Ma Yongfeng, Ni Haifeng

Screening at:

VIDEOZONE: 3

The 3rd International Video-Art Biennial in Israel

Artistic Directors/ Chief Organisers: Sergio Edelzstein and Diana Shoef
Centre for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, Israel
29 November to 4 December 2006

Visit:

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Video-REAL

Video-REAL takes the viewer into the inner realms of *media art* in China. Known by the term *meiti yishu*, *media art* developed during the course of the past 20 years, when a growing number of artists across China started to use hand-held video cameras for experimental art production. Starting in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, artists began tapping into video's documentary capacities, resulting in the production of documentary films. These emphasized proceedings in 'real time' and 'real space', using the camera as a tool to document and substantiate 'real life' events. The Chinese term for reality, *xianshi*, is used in the term realism (*xianshi zhuyi*). Essentially, the term describes the *actuality* of a given event, but it also produces awareness of a certain displacement that arises with representation. It is thus associated with the term *xianxiang*, marking the *phenomenon* or *appearance of things*. In recent years, these terms have laid the foundation for artists using the concept of *xianchang*, which literally translates as the *actual scene* (of an incident), but is also used to identify the precedence of *human action* in documentation.

Some documentary practice can be related to the deficiency of the camera, where artists work in an almost Derridean fashion, and reality becomes detached from the truth or falsity of the scenario. In the Chinese, the context of these documentations of the 'real' function as a reaction against the allegories and social-political commentary so popular in the formation of socialist realism. This is where the theme of the program, *Video – REAL* comes into its own; whereby each of the participating artists realizes that, despite an ongoing interest in documenting 'reality', no one can escape the fact that every documentary representation depends upon its own detour of the real through the limitations of the audio-visual signifier. In the recent history of video art in China, artists have been predominantly concerned with the remediation of the medium of video. With the medium in mind, many artists have tried to close the 'detour from the real' by capturing reality on film.

Curator:

Thomas J. Berghuis has recently completed his PhD dissertation on Performance Art in China at the University of Sydney (Australia), following an MA in Sinology at Leiden University (The Netherlands). During the past 10 years he has frequently traveled to China for his research, and from 2003 to 2004 he was a visiting scholar at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Besides his academic career Berghuis was also involved in several curatorial projects, most notably as Associate Curator for the 6th Sharjah International Biennale, U.A.E (2003), and as Curator for the 1st Dashanzi International Arts Festival at the 798 Factory in Beijing (2004). His writings have been published in various magazines and art publications, such as *Art Asia Pacific*, *Artlink*, *Mesh* and *positions*. His book, *Performance Art in China*, will be published in October 2006 with Timezone 8, Hong Kong.

Artists and artworks:

Wang Jianwei, Born 1958 in Sichuan Province, Lives and works in Beijing.

Wang Jianwei was originally trained as an oil painter; he initially studied at the Chengdu Painting institute in Sichuan Province (1983-1985), and continued with a postgraduate degree at the Oil Painting Department of the Zhejiang Academy in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province (1985-1987). From the early 1990s, Wang Jianwei began to focus his work on new media and has become one of the most renowned media artists in China. His work had been featured in numerous prominent national and international exhibitions including the *First Kwangju Biennale*, (1995), *Documenta X* (Kassel, 1997), *Cities on the Move* (Humlebaek, New York and London, 1999), the China National Pavilion at the 25th *Sao Paulo Biennial*, (2003), The 50th *Venice Biennale* (2003), and the 5th *Shanghai Biennale* (2004).

Square, 2003, 15.00 min, 1 Channel DVD, Beijing

The video *Square* depicts a careful analysis of the cultural-historic role of Marxism in structuring Chinese society, from the founding of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949 until the present day. It treats the camera as a recording device that captures the public behavior of ordinary citizens – many of whom come from the countryside – whilst they visit the national parade on Tiananmen Square in Beijing during the annual celebration of National Day, on October 1st.



Video Stills of: Wang Jianwei, *Square*, 2003, 15.00 min, 1 Channel DVD, Beijing, © Image: Courtesy of Wang Jianwei

Zhao Liang, Born 1971 in Liaoning Province, Lives and works in Beijing. Zhao Liang graduated in 1992 at the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts in Shenyang, Liaoning Province and from 1993-1994 he continued his studies at the Beijing Film and Television Academy. Since then, Zhao Liang has focussed his career on producing a series of prominent documentary films and video works. These internationally highly acclaimed works participated in the 16th *World Wide Video Festival* (Amsterdam, 1998), ARS 01, the 13th *Video Brazil International Electronic Art Festival* (Sao Paolo, 2001), and the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (2001, 2005 and 2006).

City Scene, 2004, 23.11 min, 1 Channel DVD, Beijing

City Scene is one of Zhao Liang's most prominent video works to-date. It features an intriguing collection of scenes of everyday live in Beijing, which had been recorded over a period of 10 years, between 1994 and 2004. This work directs the viewer towards an understanding of the notion of *xianchang*, whereby the camera is capable of recording and transmitting the *scenes of incidents*, as they occur in time and space, and thereby determine social behavior in and around the rapidly growing city of Beijing.



Video Stills of: Zhao Liang, *City Scene*, 2004, 23.11 min, 1 Channel DVD, Beijing, © Image: Courtesy of Zhao Liang

Qiu Zhijie, Born 1965 in Fujian Province, Lives and works in Beijing and Hangzhou. From an early age, Qiu Zhijie studied calligraphy with his grandfather at their home in Fujian Province. In 1992 he graduated at the Printmaking Department of the prestigious Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, which was recently renamed the China Art Academy, and where he continued to work as a teacher at the New Media Department. Since the 1990s, he has worked in various media including calligraphy, photography, video, installation, and in organizing prominent live art events. His works have featured in numerous exhibitions; including the *14th Asian International Art Exhibition* (Fukuoka, 1999), the *1st Guangzhou Triennale* (2002), the *50th Venice Biennial* (2003), and the *5th Shanghai Biennale* (2004).

***Mountain, Water, River, Lake*, 2005, 9.00 min, 1 Channel DVD, Hangzhou**

"On the peak of the Wushan Hill lies a pavilion from which you can see both the river and the lake". This video asks the question if what we see is real and involves a small group of students from the new media department of the China Art Academy in Hangzhou. *Mountain, Water, River, Lake* deals with the historical legends of the former Imperial Capital, which lies buried underneath the new City. It asks whether we need to be reminded of our cultural tradition through recreating historical sites and buildings or whether it is more important to nurture such traditions in one's heart.

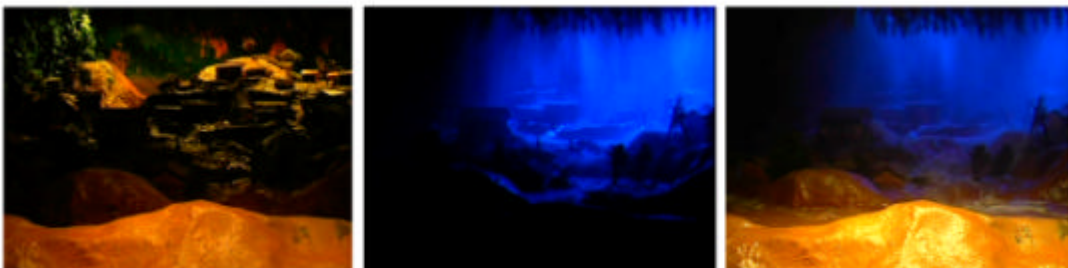


Video Stills of: Qiu Zhijie, *Mountain, Water, River, Lake*, 2005, 9.00 min, 1 Channel DVD, Hangzhou, © Image Courtesy of Qiu Zhijie

Ma Yongfeng, Born 1971 in Shanxi Province, Lives and works in Beijing. Following his career as a prominent writer and critic, Ma Yongfeng took up a career as a full-time media artist after he had moved to Beijing in 2000. Since then, he has been widely acclaimed both nationally and internationally for his video and photography works, many of which involve investigations into the compound interchanges between reality and artificiality. His work has featured in several significant exhibitions, including the *13th Video Brazil International Electronic Art Festival* (Sao Paolo, 2003), *Art Focus 4, International Biennial of Contemporary Art* (Jerusalem, 2003), the *Thailand New Media Art Festival* (Bangkok, 2004), and *The Thirteen: Chinese Video Now* (New York, 2005).

***Storm Model*, 2005, 4.39 min, 1 Channel DVD, Beijing**

In preparing this video work Ma Yongfeng spent several weeks working on a large model of a Chinese mountain-village that is struck by a severe storm, complete with torrential rains, floods, and combining sound, and light-effects. After the video was produced, Ma Yongfeng proceeded to destroy the installation. This work sets out to challenge the relationship between digital video, installation, and the common practice of model building, particularly by natural history museums. These man-made constructions represent mock-up residues of the real world, where people and animals are transported into the simulacra of the origin of species.



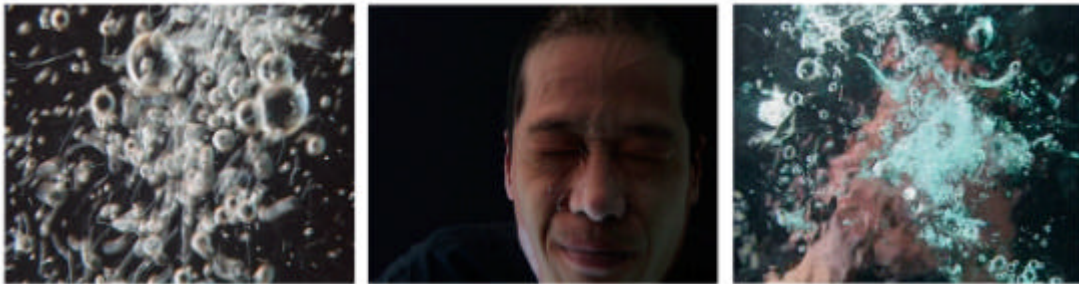
Video Stills of: Ma Yongfeng, *Storm Model*, 2005, 4.39 min, 1 Channel DVD, Beijing, © Image: Courtesy of Ma Yongfeng

Ni Haifeng, Born 1964 in Zhejiang Province, Lives and Works in Amsterdam.

Ni Haifeng graduated in 1986 at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts (recently renamed the China Art Academy). Soon after, he became one of the founding members of the Group *70% Red, 25% Black, 5% White*, which is also known as the *Red Humor* Group. In 1992 Ni Haifeng moved to Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and became one of the prominent members of the Dutch art scene. In recent years Ni Haifeng has traveled back to China on a regularly basis, where his work was well received, gaining him further acclaim in China as well as internationally. His work has featured in numerous important exhibitions, including in *China/ Avant-Garde* (Berlin, Rotterdam, Oxford and Odense, 1993-1994), *Unpacking Europe* (Rotterdam, 2001), the *5th Shanghai Biennale* (2004), *Out of Sight* (Amsterdam, 2005), and the *2nd Guangzhou Triennale* (2005).

Face, 2005, 14.00 min, 1 Channel DVD, Amsterdam

The body occupies a strong role in the work of Ni Haifeng, particularly the way in which the body is inscribed with typecasting of race and gender. By moving between different cultures, Ni Haifeng offers the viewer a series of critical investigations how the human gaze operates, particularly when inscribed by media culture, which blurs our perceptions of reality. In *Face* the viewer is drawn into the phenomenological experience of the artist's embodied existence in time and space, as we watch him washing his face from the bottom of a washbasin. Gradually the rinsed off dust and dead skin particles blur the water, whilst the soundtrack increasingly focuses on the background noises of the surrounding city, at one point revealing the distinct sound of a tram passing over a bridge on an Amsterdam canal.



Video Stills of: Ni Haifeng, *Face*, 2005, 14.00 min, 1 Channel DVD, Amsterdam, © Image: Courtesy of Ni Haifeng