

In esclusiva per VersOriente! *I'intervista a Xing Danwen*

A cura di Marco Meccarelli

M.M.: Here in Rome we know your art by the installation Sleep Walking of the exposure guangYin. Could you introduce your artistic dimension? Speak us about your art.

DX: For this particular work, please see the work statement of Sleep Walking.

"The videos show images from the Western cities in the USA and Europe where I have lived and traveled, but it is scored with the music of Chinese traditional instruments and the everyday sounds of life in China.

Memory exists in the past, and the present will soon become memory. This work is not about Travel, and it should not simply be considered as a personal life experience. It is about DISLOCATION; how one's mind can blur the distinctions between memory and the present, and reality and fiction.

The work may be read as a comment on how globalization has led to a standardized, uniformity of urban quotidian life, and how image and sound from the East and West can resemble each other and meld together as well as show great cultural differences. On another level, the work also shows how the mind can take images from very different places and weave them together into a seamless world of continuous memory."

M.M.: Could you introduce in a generalized manner your art, also through your life experience?

D.X.: Regarding to my work in general, there are three periods.

A) Before 1998 (Early work), the subjects of my work was more reflected to my personal issues, such as identity, gender and generation. The main works are "a Personal Diary of Chinese Avant-garde Art in 1990s", "Born with Cultural Revolution" and "I am a Woman", etc.

B) 1998-2002 (New York period), my work was more experimental with the relationship between photography (still) and video (motion), and the major theme was Displacement and Dislocation between the memory and presence, fiction and reality, reflecting to the issues of cultural, geographic and space. The main works are "Sleep Walking", "Scroll" and "Strip", etc.

C) 2002-today (the presence), I have mostly lived and worked in Beijing. Confront of the reality in China - the development influenced and shaped by modernization and globalization, my experience to the west makes me very aware and conscious

about the conflicts between modernity and tradition, dream and reality. This becomes the major themes and personal concern in my work. The main works are "disCONNEXION", "DUPLICATION" and "Urban Fiction".



M.M.: In your multimedia installation Sleep Walking we can see a reproduction of an ancient Ming case. What's kind of tradition there is in your modern art? What's the tradition for you?

DX: I don't really understand this question.

The Ming style of trunk is no longer a realistic object since it is conceptualized and made in transparency (none original material). It becomes an abstract meaning – a container of my brain and storage with memory, thoughts, emotions and identity of who I am – being a Chinese with my won cultural background and the root of tradition.

Regarding to the tradition, it is not figurative and visualized simply to the appearance of my work but it is the fundamental base to my inspiration and creation, like the blood inside me. It is totally a cultural and philosophical issue.

M.M.: In the artwork, between the photos, we can see western country, in particular New York where you lived. How has been this experience?

DX: Actually the primary idea of this work was from my experience of the first time visit to Paris. It was about "being lost in front of the actual city" which I only found it again in the masters' paintings that I had been familiar to.

New York is a very unusual place, an individual city where should not be simply considered as America. It is one of the icons of cosmopolitan, and where I feel strongly about the displacement and dislocation culturally and emotionally. I think it is a very special place if one could have some personal experience in real time from all aspects.

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For more info on this Chinese artist, browse the site: www.danwen.com

Note

(1) Cfr VersOriente' article: browse: www.versoriente.it/guangyin.htm (Top)

In esclusiva per VersOriente! l'intervista a Xing Danwen II parte

A cura di Marco Meccarelli

Marco Meccarelli: You are an important witness of the Chinese artistic avant-garde of years '90. Tell us about your fundamental experience. There are particular anecdotes that you would want to tell? There is a performance or a particular artist that has attracted your attention? How do you feel to being artist and also witness, by your photos, of Chinese avant-garde?

D.X.: I am not only a witness. First of all that I was a participant, I think. So correctly speaking, that I have witnessed 90s Chinese avant-garde by participating and being as an artist among the movement.

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Regarding to this subject, a book called, is coming out in the Fall 2004 by SCALO. This book includes more than 200 photographs taken by me from 1993-1998, a descriptive narration by myself, and an introduction by Li Xian-ting.

So, this book will answer all of your questions, I believe.



M.M.: You are been born during Cultural Revolution. What is it represented and how much the Mao-Think has influenced your art?

D.X.: Yes, I was born in Cultural Revolution and grew up through this historical decade, that I can't avoid the influence of Mao's spirits. This experience has become a picture of the past deeply archived in my memory. It makes me critical with a better understanding and awareness to the picture of today.

I don't think Mao's think has much reflection to my artwork. The change of the ideology and system in this country and the transition from socialist to capitalist did have given a big impact to my work. And it has caused the reasons and emotions to my double-mirrored thinking and observation to the life, society and global picture.

I believe my generation definitely has different understanding and view from the younger generation born after the Cultural Revolution.



M.M.: In your works, for example Scroll, there are photographs of the sea. In Chinese culture the nature has got a fundamental function. What is the Nature for you?

DX: I am not particularly interested in "the nature of NATURE". If I have included visuals of the nature in my work, it is just a perception based on the philosophy of "the world exists because of 'I'", which is very subjective. It doesn't make any difference to me if I "borrow" the human figure, the nature or any existing reality. They are in my works is to serve my concepts and ideas. In the way, the figurative and realistic pictures of mine are more "surreal" than "real".

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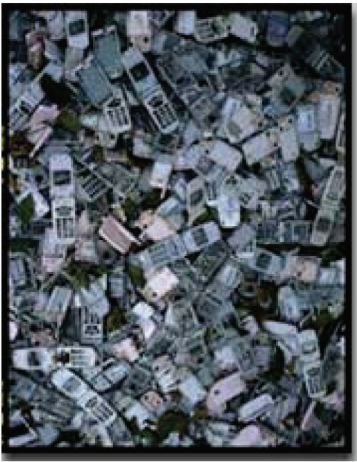
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A cura di Marco Meccarelli

Marco Meccarelli: There are some artists who are a sort of model for your art? If there are, they are western or oriental artists?

D.X.: I do have some favourite artists or artwork, who have given me certain influences periodically, but no one has been a model for me and my art. The influence to me is more spiritual and intellectual.

M.M.How much the western movements of art have influenced you?

*D.X.:*I had a 10 years painting background before my first photographs. The western painting from Renaissance – Impressionism – Post Expressionism has influenced my vision and aesthetic to visual art. With photography, I was self-taught, and had no rules and roots to the systematic study and knowledge. I think it was the great begin-point for me with this medium, that I was more free and boundary-less with my own initiative instinct and talent to establish the eye, my own vision to imagery.



M.M.: Could you talk us your works disCONNEXION?

D.X.: Please read my work statement: It is not simply a documentary or journalistic work. I intend to bring up a picture and awareness of our 21st century modernity by borrowing the reality. I carefully choose direct and intimate moments to portray the objects that I find. The aesthetic quality of the imagery almost removes the photographed objects from their social context. But I cannot forget the facts and the reality of what I see.

Since the summer 2002, I have traveled several times to South China's Guangdong Province, one of the most developed areas in the country. Along the coast, more than 100,000 people from Guangdong and migrant workers from Western China make their living by recycling piles of computer and electronic trash, operating in rough environment and social conditions. This huge amount of e-trash is shipped from industrialized countries - Japan, South Korea and mostly from the United States -, and dumped here.

We are in an information and communication era, and rely extensively on these high-tech facilities for our modern life. These machines become deeply rooted in our daily activities, replacing the old ways of doing things. Millions of newly purchased products follow on millions of trashed ones. Confronted with vast piles of dead and deconstructed machines, the overwhelming number of cords, wires, chips and parts, with the clear indication of the company names, model numbers and even individual employees, I felt shocked.



Modernization and globalization shape urban development. In my country, I have experienced and witnessed the changes that have taken place under the influence of Western modernity. These changes have contributed to a strong and powerful push for development in China, but at the same time they have led to a big environmental and social nightmare in remote corners of China.

I have lived in New York, and traveled forth and back between my mother country and the West. It has made me more aware of the conflicts between modernity and tradition, dream and reality.

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l'intervista a Xing Danwen

IV e ultima parte

A cura di Marco Meccarelli

English version

Marco Meccarelli: Is there a conceptual artistic contribution in your works?

Danwen Xing: Each body of my work is different from its exploration of the subject matter and experiment to the aesthetic issue. I only can talk separately and individually but not in general. You can easily find out from the work statements on each different bodies of work from my website: www.danwen.com www.danwen.com.

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M.M.: In Chinese art we talk about conceptual photograph. Could we say that your art follows this current?

D.X.: After 20th century modern art era, the conceptual art became the main issue. I think the concept is the essential brain to an artwork.

My art? I don't know how to name it but definitely contemporary... :-)



M.M.: What are your most recent works?

DX: My most recent work is "Urban Fiction", a large series of photographs. This new body of work is still in progress. Only one piece of large scale of photograph is complete and on view in Paris, at the galerie Piece Unique through Sept.15 2004.



M.M.: What is that you want people to take away from your work? How has your work been received by other countries?

DX: Different body of work might receive different aspects of feedbacks. I don't think it is caused by the region of countries, it is more referred to the audiences' knowledge, interests and personal tastes, the issues to what they could respond by their emotions and minds.

My work is conceptual but as well very visualized with a universal language...a conscious concern and perspective to humanity, society and life.

M.M.: Thank you Danwen for this very interesting interview: We have spoken about your art, the contemporary culture, the intercultural contacts and differences between East and West. A last question before leaving you: which question you would never like to answer?

DX.: I don't know what I would never answer. Certainly I am not interested in politics in China!

For more info on this Chinese artist browse the site www.danwen.com

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