

Artist Statement (written in 2001, New York)

Sleep Walking, 2001

Memory exists in the past, and the present will soon become memory. In Sleep Walking, I examine the effect of dislocation and how one's mind can blur the distinctions between memory and present, reality and fiction, permanence and impermanence.

What is more true, the present or a memory, reality or imagination?

It is a question I have often considered after my first visit to Paris in the early 1990s. I had studied European painting since my teenage years. I had known European masters and their art in numerous art books, with particular attention to the impressionists and the post-impressionists who I studied devoutly at the beginning of my painting practices. Through their works, I had my first impression of Paris.

In autumn of 1993, my friend took me from Hamburg to Paris. Arriving in Paris in the early morning, I saw a city in pale twilight. The houses and building seemed ordinary and the winding alleys were dotted with waste and dirt. I wasn't excited about my final arrival in this romantic, and romanticized city that I had been longing for. Instead, I was skeptical. Was this Paris?

Was I disappointed by this fact? I still cannot answer this question, but I did feel lost. It was not the Paris I had known in my art books. Later, while visiting museums, I found my "Paris". This experience made me think a lot. This unforgettable feeling of dislocation caused me to analyze relationships between reality and illusion, the present and memory. Sleep Walking was inspired by this sense of Parisian dislocation, and also by my experiences living in New York at the time.

In Sleep Walking, videos show images from cities in the United States and Europe where I have lived and traveled. But, they are accompanied by a soundtrack composed with Chinese traditional instruments and the ambient sounds of life in China, which were completely a different location from the videos.

Sleep Walking may be read as a comment on how globalization has led to a standardized, uniform urban life and how image and sound from the East and West can resemble each other, but also reveals cultural differences between homeland and identity. Simultaneously, the work

depicts how the mind weaves together images from different places into a seamless tale of continuous memory. Despite its formal lyricism, *Sleep Walking* implies a sense of loss, of displacement, of contending values and memories. It is a meditation on a self-caught between a past absent of meaning and a transitory present/future in which cultures, values, and subjectivities collide, yielding unpredictable realities.

The single channel video is a 10-minute independent film, projected onto a floor-to-ceiling screen and presented with a soundtrack. The soundtrack records the quotidian sounds of contemporary China accompanied by traditional music instruments, and composed with electronic sound mix. These sounds contrast with the seamless stream of images of New York City, where I lived at the time. Together, the sound and images create a disorienting relationship between time and space. This disorientation is somewhat incongruous with the poetic allure of the work.

As an installation, *Sleep Walking* consists of two 10-minute streaming video projections, a soundtrack and a traditional Ming dynasty trunk made of transparent Plexiglas and copper fitting. Traditionally, Ming-style trunks served as depositories for family treasures and heirlooms. Usually made of solid hardwood material, they were meant to resist safeguard the owner's possessions for future generations. Because it is made of Plexiglas, this trunk is not only dislocated from an ancestral past, but also, by virtue of the images of Western cities projected on trunk's bottom, is only connected to a fictitious and incoherent present. The trunk's video projects images from cities and places all over the world where I have traveled and lived, while the wall projection again shows images of New York City.

*Sleep Walking* brings together images of anonymous places from Western cityscapes, the sounds of China and an object that refers to the past and memory. In this, the work is as much about dislocation as about the inevitable convergence and divergence of East and West. In the video's non-narrative sequencing and incongruous soundtrack, auditory and visual realities are often disjointed, echoing my personal feelings of transience.

This work is presented in two versions: a two-channel video installation with a trunk; and a single channel video as an independent short film.