

Asynchronous, Parallel, Tautological, Et cetera ...

Selected artworks made by Amsterdam/ Beijing based artist Ni Haifeng from the late 1980's to the present are shown in a solo exhibition that invites the viewers to draw parallel meanings and to contemplate on their narrative as a whole. Ni's intention is to subvert such a methodology by juxtaposing artworks in a manner that refutes a linear/chronological interpretation, but to stage a tautological experience that situates art, in artist's words, "in a zero moment or an instant of no gravity."

Selected artworks made by Amsterdam/ Beijing based artist Ni Haifeng from the late 1980's to the present are shown in a solo exhibition. The practice of exhibition is meant to invite the viewers to draw parallel meanings of the artworks and in doing so to contemplate on their narrative as a whole. Ni's artwork refutes a linear or chronological interpretation by staging an experience that situates art, in the artist's words, "in a zero moment or an instant of no gravity."

For we must read between the lines; removing the artwork's temporal and physical content involves interrogating the politics of representation and exposing the inherent ideological structure that uses art to legitimate a set historical trajectory. This predicament is often done at the expense of concealing the maker's own nuances that are inherently personal and humanistic in nature. *Asynchronous, Parallel, Tautological, et cetera...* investigates the gap that demarcates the artist's own experiences and how the experiences resist the compartmentalisation of meaning within a coherent master narrative. Furthermore, Ni's marginal position in the art world provides a unique perspective for exposing the broader social economic circumstances surrounding his working process and how they affect his self-identity.

As Homi Bhabha writes, "It is from the instability of cultural signification that the national culture comes to be articulated as dialectic of various temporalities—modern, colonial, postcolonial, native [...] It is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation—I have heard and you will hear."

This exhibition is not intended to be a retrospective; instead, Ni's selection of artworks aims to open up new possibilities for reading the artworks that are not bound by the binary oppositions of "I have heard" and "you will hear". To destabilise our reading of the artworks, Ni reverses the gaze back at the beholders and asks us how we would give meaning to an experience that is autobiographical in nature. Who are we to judge the history of another individual let alone its place in history, for the artist is never an auteur in the first place. While many embrace the new promises of cultural hybridity, Ni reveals the psychological impacts of colonization and economic globalization have on our subjectivities, how best to counter the demand for self-ethnicity as a potent form of cultural capital in an ever expansive cultural economy.

By being immersed in a cyclical narrative, this exhibition provides the audiences with multiple points of departure. In essence, *Asynchronous, Parallel, Tautological, et cetera...* maps out Ni's contingent yet highly adaptive strategies: from translating a personal experience with writing to inscribing the experience on the body, or the retrieval of oneself after appropriating the culture of another to the desire to self-destruct as a way of protesting the demand for an incessant production of meaning.. These issues are not only the rubric governing this exhibition, but are also timely for a post-colony turned global city like Hong Kong to reassess its own identity as it aspires to become a cultural capital.

Unfinished Self Portrait is an installation that translates the self-portrait from a passport into a series of illegible textual and digital codes. It can be read as an outright rejection of representing oneself in a site that celebrates authorship and authenticity. *The Warehouse* is a series of photographs from the late 1980s that conveys our desire to project personal memories onto a physical origin that is always subject to change. By documenting the journey from Beijing to Amsterdam, *Penumbra* expresses the need for transgression and our inability to discern the differences between a private and a public sphere. Cast in bronze, *The Keeping of Things* is a collection of personal objects, accumulated thus far over the artist's lifespan, that are autobiographical in nature. These seemingly mundane objects function as a remnant for reflecting on the erasure of personal traits from the grand history of our time. *Self Portrait as Part of the Porcelain Export History* addresses the way in which colonial history has infringed on our body in the name of otherness, an issue central to the discussion of identity politics during the 1990s. *Domesticated* reiterates the importance of writing as an intellectual refuge for preserving oneself. *Unravelling* is a double channel video that depicts a female worker tearing apart a book and subsequently stitching it back together; the boundaries separating labour, control, and artistic practice become blurry. *Commodity and Money* depicts a page from Karl Marx's *Critique of Capitalism* that is covered with dust and connotes a decay and general fatigue with the many promises of a capitalist society. *Tautology* documents a worker who uses a sewing machine to create a complex pattern on an art history book. The modes of cultural production and industrial production have become increasingly alike.

Ni's self-critique is pertinent for questioning the contradictory role of an artist as an agency for change or as a mere service provider. The fragmentation of self resonates with a dissonance in this exhibition that falls in and out of our narration; for we must resort to improvisation and imagination as an exit or what is et cetera...

—David Ho Yeung Chan

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