

### Yang Fudong's video installations a contemporary form of Chinese hand scrolls

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#### CHINA HONG KONG VIDEO ART CONTEMPORARY ART TALK

On 12 December 2012, Yang Fudong was invited by *Asia Art Archive*, in collaboration with Videotage's One World Exposition, to shed some light on his unique aesthetic through an explanation of the video works now on show at Spring Workshop and Osage in Hong Kong.



Talk by Yang Fudong held at Asia Art Archive in December 2011. Image courtesy Asia Art Archive.



Yang Fudong, 'Backyard — Hey! Sun is Rising', 2001, 35mm B&W film/DVD, 13 min. Image courtesy Asia Art Archive.

**Yang Fudong** (b. Beijing, 1971) is a renowned Chinese artist who has been working in film, video and installation since the 1990s. The December 2011 talk at Asia Art Archive was held as part of the One World Exposition, a month-long event administered by art organisation Videotage in an effort to "explore Chinese [new] media art from regional, national and global perspectives ... [t]hrough a series of symposia, exhibitions, artist's talks, performances and screenings of Chinese media art from the Mainland and Greater China." It was held in Chinese and translated into English by Hong Kong-based independent curator and art writer **Valerie Doran**.

### **Yang Fudong's painterly videos**

In spite of his present use of new media, Yang Fudong revealed in his talk that painting has had a major influence on the development of his work. He illustrated how, during his scholarship at the **China Fine Arts Academy in Hangzhou** from 1991 to 1995, he and his fellow students attempted to equal masters such as **Lucian Freud**, **Gerhard Richter**, **Francis Bacon** and **Anselm Kiefer**.

The artist pointed out some questions he wanted to resolve as a student and later on, as he shifted his attention to photography, film and video. Some of these questions remain at the core of his artistic research today: What is of major importance in the relationship between technique, narrative and story? Should a work be painterly?

Yang believes that there are few boundaries between painting, photography, video and film, stating that "when he looks at a painting it is like a film, and conversely he sees film as painting", adding that "photography and painting are both like a still". Said Yang,

Painting gives you greater freedom than film, but basically a painter and a film maker share the same problem, that is, How to give form to what's in one's mind?



Yang Fudong, 'An Estranged Paradise', 1997-2002, 35 mm B&W film. Image courtesy ShanghaiART Gallery.

Through a showing of excerpts of his first film, *An Enstranged Paradise* (1997-2002), Yang reflected on his artistic signature. This 35 mm black-and-white film, which was shown at the European new media art festival Documenta XI (Documenta 11), starts with a meditation on the composition of space in Chinese painting and poetically depicts the spiritual instability of a young intellectual in the legendary city of Hangzhou. "Creating a certain sense of atmosphere, rather than giving an explanation is what I pursue in my work," he said.

### Seeking refuge from China's growth

After gaining recognition in the international art world, Yang said that he was able to broaden the scope of his artistic research by creating *Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest* (2003-2007), presented at the Venice Biennale in 2007. The film is based on the historical story of seven talented intellectuals in **the Three Kingdoms period** who sought refuge from political upheaval in a bamboo forest.

The legend finds its parallel in the five-part structure of the film, in which seven young men and women move away from their enclosed city lives to reappear in the totally different settings of the legendary **Yellow Mountain**, a rural village and the seaside before moving back to the city.

The film can be interpreted as a metaphor for young Chinese people who are struggling to find their place in the fast-paced changes of present-day China. Said Yang,

'Seven Intellectuals in a Bamboo Forest' is a response to the incredibly sped up process of artistic creation today in China. I asked myself what the difference would be if I would slow it down. Therefore, as I began to shoot, I thought of it as a continuous process, without any script.



Yang Fudong, 'The Fifth Night', 2010, HD video installation, 7 screens, B&W, sound, 10 min. Image courtesy Spring Workshop.

## Installations resemble Chinese hand scrolls

Recently, Yang took on another challenge: creating large-scale installations. *The Fifth Night* (2010), **on show at Spring Workshop until 8 January 2012**, is a huge installation composed of seven synchronised projections staging scenes of old Shanghai through the perspective of different people who bear no apparent relationship to each other. Yang explained the work,

With this film I want to question the experience of watching. The viewer may focus on one frame and try to look only at one point, yet he will be influenced by the light of the other frames, which makes it impossible to look at only one frame.

The idea behind this work came from a reflection on film production. A new filming method was used for this video installation. The framing and perspective differs in every single screen, using different lenses for each screen while all is filmed at the same moment.

Yang Fudong characterises his installations as “spatial film” or “multiple views” film and compares the technique to a contemporary form of the Chinese hand scroll.



Yang Fudong, 'The Fifth Night', 2010, HD video installation, 7 screens, B&W, sound, 10 min. Image courtesy Spring Workshop.

**One World Exposition** will run until 8 January 2012 at **Hanart Square, Osage Kwun Tong, Osage Open, Run Run Shaw Creative Media Centre** and **Spring Workshop**. The event features a broad range of events and exhibitions including video screenings, symposiums and artwork or performances by eighteen artists.

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