

# ARTINFO

## Chinese Video Art Star Yang Fudong on His Meditative New Film Noir, "Fifth Night"



Still from Yang Fudong's "Fifth Night," 2011

Courtesy the artist and Spring (Workshop)

by Mary

Agnew

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HONG  
KONG—As  
part of its  
continuing  
mission to  
promote  
video and  
new media  
art  
throughout  
Hong Kong  
and greater  
Asia, local

outfit **Videotage** has created the "One World Exposition," a series of shows spread across the significant spaces of **Osage Hong Kong**, **Hanart TZ**, and the new, not-yet-open, **Spring (Workshop)** in the city's Aberdeen neighborhood. The series includes work by over 28 participants from throughout Asia working with new media technologies. The project was curated by **Isaac Leung** and **Li Zhenhua**, who called on a panel of experts in Asian video and new media art for assistance.

Installed in a cavernous, darkened gallery in the massive Spring (Workshop) is Videotage's key work, the seven unique videos that comprise Shanghai-based video artist and photographer **Yang Fudong's** cinematic "Fifth Night."

Yang is one of China's most acclaimed video artists. His "Seven Intellectuals in Bamboo Forest" (2007) was shown at the 2007 **Venice Biennale**, and his work has also been shown at New York's **Museum of Modern Art**, the **Gramercy Theater**, and the **International Center of Photography**. Last year, he also shot a much-admired campaign for fashion house **Prada** utilizing the moody, black-and-white aesthetic for which he is known.

In "Fifth Night," seven large screens are arranged in parallel along one wall of the gallery space. The screens are set flush against one another, creating a continuous composition that nods at the aesthetic of traditional Chinese hand-scroll painting. The work illustrates Yang's interest in time and narrative voice.

What makes this work extraordinary is that the seven perspectives were shot simultaneously; during filming, each camera operator stayed out of the range of every other. This continuity in timeline creates a tension and precision palpable in every frame. There is a sense of floating anxiety and drama between Yang's artificial, 1930s-style sets and the deliberate, classical movements of his actors that pulls the piece together into a composite whole.

"Fifth Night" is by no means a passive viewing experience. As viewers, our eyes are drawn to the fine details and quiet choreography of each scene, yet we are simultaneously expected to absorb the complete experience of the piece. Yang demands a motivated and participatory audience, a requirement that is key to his ability to turn the mundane into elegant art.

**ARTINFO** spoke to Yang about the process of creating "Fifth Night," his inspiration for the piece, and what he's planning for 2012.

**How did you initially conceive of "Fifth Night" and what was the setting you imagined for the piece?**

Well, it all came from the filming process. "Fifth Night" is actually based around the exploration of many different classic movie shots. There are seven screens, and the one to the far left has a broad view of the whole scene, while the one in the middle has a standard view with a number 50 lens, and the screen to the far right has a number 30 lens. On every screen you see a different perspective and different movements taking place.

**Who are the characters starring in the film?**

"Fifth Night" is really a series of solos. If you look at the boy or the girl character, they actually don't know each other. They are just wandering around on the street or the plaza aimlessly. It is important to me that they are someone young, but the characters are not exactly set. They are like John and Jane Doe — just anonymous young people.

**Why is there this emphasis on solitary experience?**

Sometimes, we can't just put the emphasis on the abstract form or format of the piece. For both the creator and audience, it is important to look at how there could be some psychological side to the art. Here, each actor or actress only feels the weight of their own existence during this very specific time. It is very quiet at this time of night — it is a moment that provokes solitary thinking.

**What were the challenges of creating a work that has such a complex technical aspect to it?**

During the shoot, we had to use seven machines at the same time, so one of the main problems was making sure we were not able to see any of the other cameras in any of the shots. We had to do rehearsals with the actors, which took up a whole day before we could actually shoot anything.



## **Why was it so important to you to shoot it all at once and not break up the process?**

Because of completeness. Because the film is shot during the very late night, and you can see different qualities of darkness and different movements going on all at once. The piece represents a silent dialogue that is continuous and unbreakable. If it were broken up, it would become a totally different concept. “Making Fifth Night” was like making a very long painting — if you are working on one end, that means the rest of the paper must be blank.

## **When creating a piece of art like “Fifth Night” as opposed to a commercial movie, how is your working process different?**

It is just like making a movie, like a normal shoot. We needed preparation time like any other film project. Actually, it took me two years to reach a final decision about my original idea of making “Fifth Night,” and we needed to go through casting and the normal procedures, which took up a lot of time.

## **Where did your original inspiration for the piece come from?**

I started with this blurry idea that I wanted to do something with many cameras recording the same shot at the same time, using a boy and a girl in a lonely, anonymous dialogue. Then I moved on to the technical stuff — how to actually shoot the scene and where it would be located.

## **What significance does the title, “Fifth Night,” have?**

The film is about a lonely internal dialogue, so the aspect of the night is important. The fifth hour represents the loneliness of being by yourself at this late time of night. Also, it was a Friday when we shot it, so it was the fifth day of the week.

## **What is the environment in China like for creating new media art now?**

I think the development of new media in Mainland China, and even more so in Hong Kong, is very fast and quite heated at the moment. I believe that very rapid development in technology, for example people using computers in different forms and being online all the time, will have a great impact on how audiences perceive new media art.

## **What are you working on now?**

I am taking a break right now. I will worry about the next thing next year. I want to do one project at a time — artists are only human, after all.

*Yang Fudong’s “The Fifth Night,” 2010, is showing as part of One World Exposition, presented by Videotage through January 8 at Spring (Workshop), 3/F Remex Centre, 42 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong*