

KADIST ART FOUNDATION

PARIS

Press Release

Zhou Tao *The Training*

Opening reception: Friday, February 1, from 6 to 9 pm.

Exhibition dates: from February 2 to April 14, 2013.

Since November 2012, Kadist artist-in-residence, Zhou Tao (b.1976) has been working on his new film, *After Reality*, which will be presented with *Collector* (2012).

Both works result from a state of vigilance sought by the artist. With an economy of means, Zhou Tao directs our eyesight towards different landscapes by isolating each of their intrinsic elements to trace the life out.

It will take chance and precision to detect new forms of relations between things, people and places, unveiled by the film's editing.

In that sense one could quote Robert Bresson for whom «to create is not to deform or invent persons or things. It is to tie new relationships between persons and things which are and *as they are*.»

Rather than «making» a film, Zhou Tao declares that he «looks for» it, through various places, architectures, people or communities, as their gradually catch his sight.

For *After Reality* some images were shot in Guangzhou (China) and others in Paris in abandoned, urban or rural surroundings, on transitional areas, roadside edges or railway banks, all of them similar to what French landscape gardener, Gilles Clément, refers to as the «Third Landscape». **Thanks to a precise editing in alternating images that were shot in Paris and Guangzhou, Zhou Tao uses the film to create a third space.** His gaze rests as much on the biodiversity of these escheated areas, as on the performing body that acts, digs, pulls things, trains... In this way the artist shows us a survival community that has escaped all urban planning project. The exploration of marginal spaces produced by our society allows to develop alternatives to their way of functioning and to the space we occupy in them.

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Opening Hours:

From Thursday to Sunday, from 2pm to 7pm
or by appointment.

UPCOMING PROGRAM:

Clark House Initiative, a Curatorial Collaborative started in 2010 and based in India, by **Zasha Colah** (b.1982) and **Sumesh Sharma** (b. 1983) will be in residency at Kadist from January to April, 2013 and will present the exhibition ***Cues for Three*** (working title) from May to July.

with the artists: **Padmini Chettur, Prajakta Potnis, Zamthingla Ruivah**

www.ClarkHouseInitiative.org

Artist's Biography: Zhou Tao

Born in Changsha in 1976, Zhou Tao lives and works in Guangzhou, China

Solo Project

2012

Open Studio: Seek for Geothermal Heat, Times Museum, Guangzhou, CN

2011

The Man who Plants Scenarios, Queens Nails Projects, San Francisco, CA

2009

1234-, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge MA, US.

Selected Group Exhibitions

2011

Body Talks, Video Art In Public Space, Maastricht, Holland

Beyond the Crisis, 6th Curitiba Biennial, Curitiba, Brazil

Art Nova, Art Basel Miami Beach, Vitamin Creative Space, USA

Moving Image in China, 1988-2011, Mingsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, China

Support > System, Luckman Fine Arts Complex, Los Angeles, CA

2010

Non-Aligned, Marina Abramovic Institute West, San Francisco (curator: Jovana Stokic)

Yes, But---, Location One, New York, NY (curator: Claudia Calirman)

2009

Dress Codes, Third ICP Triennial of Photography and Video, International

Center of Photography, New York, US. (curator: Christopher Phillips)

Double Happiness, Leonhardi Kulturprojekte, Frankfurt, Germany. (curator: Felicia Herrschaft)

The Big World: Recent Art from China, Chicago Cultural Center, US. (curators: Tereza De Arruda, Greg Knight)

Portrait of Self-Exile, Vitamin art space and the Shop, Beijing. (curator: Hu Fang)

2008

Trans local motion, 7th Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai Art Museum Shanghai, China. (curators: Julian Heynen, Henk Slager, Zhang Qing)

China Power Station Part III, MUDAM: Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (curators: Julia Peyton-Jones, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B. Kvaran)

Depart-Guangdong Hong Kong Macau, He Xiang Ning art museum/OCT Art Center, Shenzhen. (Curators: Wang Jin and Fang lihua)

Guangzhou Station—Special Exhibition Contemporary Art Of Guangdong, Guangdong Museum of Art, China, Guangzhou. (Curators: Chen Tong, Yangxiaoyan, Pi Daojian)

2007

China Power Station part II, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art Oslo. (Curators: Hans Ulrich Obrist and Gunnar B. Kvaran)

Changes - video art from China - 24HR Art, Darwin, NT, Sydney. (Curator: Binhui Huangpu)

Square Box, Art Beijing Platform China Beijing. (Curator: Sun Ning)

2006

La rivoluzione siamo noi, Isola d'Arte, Milano, Italy. (Curator: Martina Koppel Yang)

Accumulation-Canton Express, Tang Contemporary Art Center, Beijing, China. (Curator: Martina Koppel Yang)
Gambling, Para/Site Art Space, Hong Kong
Asia-Pacific Documentary Video and Film Festival, Asia-Australia Arts Center, Sydney, (Curator: Binhui Huangpu)
Shift Guangdong museum of art, Guangzhou, China

Grant

2009 Grantee of Asian Cultural Council fellowship

Residency Program

2009-2010

Artist in Residence at Location One, New York.

Zhou Tao is represented by Vitamin Creative space (Guangzhou , China)
<http://www.vitamincreativespace.com>

Pictures Available

After Reality, 2013
video still



Pictures Available

The Collector, 2012
video still



Previous articles

Jeanne Gerrity

Zhou Tao: The Man Who Plants Scenarios

Queens Nails Projects, San Francisco
March 18–31, 2011



Zhou Tao, installation view of *South Stone*, 2010, digital prints and single-channel video, 25 mins. Courtesy of the artist and Queens Nails Project, San Francisco.

In the dimly lit first room of Queens Nails Projects, a compact alternative arts space in San Francisco, a meditative video, *South Stone* (2010–11), by the young Guangzhou-based artist Zhou Tao is projected on the wall across from the entrance. Nineteen colour photographs related to the video hang on two facing walls; the majority of the prints are paired with an adjacent text written in English. The exhibition, titled *The Man Who Plants Scenarios* and curated by Xiaoyu Weng, also includes two other video works, *One Day* (2007) and *Time in New York* (2009), and a video installation, *Power Here* (2008). *One Day*, *Time in New York*, and *Power Here* are consistent with Zhou Tao's earlier work; the three pieces approach the rituals of everyday existence with a sense of levity and ingenuity, transforming the mundane into a form of theatre.

One Day and *Time in New York* revolve around the daily life of the artist, showing the humour and absurdity of modern living. The twelve-minute *One Day* documents an entire day spent in a department store, a consumer paradise selling everything from clothes to appliances to hot meals, while *Time in New York* expresses Zhou's reaction to the culture shock he experienced during a residency in New York City. *One Day* begins with a shot of Zhou Tao sitting on a pillow in a department store, wearing flip-flops, shorts, and a T-shirt, aiming a remote control at a display wall of televisions for sale. The screen soon splits, and the viewer follows Zhou Tao as he carries out his daily routine within the confines of the store. He washes his face, brushes his teeth, shaves, showers, and even relieves himself in a urinal. The performance offers a sly commentary on our easy acceptance of mass commodities and is reminiscent of the Israeli artist Guy Ben-Ner's video



Zhou Tao, *One Day*, 2007, two-channel video, 12 mins. Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou.

Opposite page: Zhou Tao, stills from *Power Here*, 2008, video installation. Courtesy of the artist and Queens Nails Project, San Francisco.

Stealing Beauty (2007). In that video, Ben-Ner, his wife, and two children inhabit an IKEA showroom as if it were their own home. *Stealing Beauty* is more straightforward in its criticism than *One Day*, made evident in Ben-Ner's invocation of Marxist concepts in his dialogue with his family about private property. However, the two videos share a common goal of exposing the over-saturation of material goods inherent in global capitalism.



Zhou Tao, *Time in New York*, 2009, single-channel video, 16 mins., 55 secs. Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou.

The sense of excess propagated in *One Day* recurs, albeit less overtly, in *Time in New York*, a seventeen-minute video created during a particularly overwhelming residency experience at Location One in Manhattan. Intimidated by the bustle of the city and challenged by language barriers, the artist resolved to remain in his small apartment for twenty days, leaving only to buy meals. Condensed and edited, the video shows the artist in different outfits, during the day and at night, always with a spool of twine casually tucked into his front pocket. By the end of the video, Zhou Tao has created a labyrinth of string that traced a literal web of his movements. This physical structure seems to bring him comfort and a sense of purpose and permanency, bringing some order into his life.



Zhou Tao, installation view of *Power Here*, 2008, video installation. Courtesy of the artist and Queens Nails Project, San Francisco.

The video installation *Power Here* (2008) addresses the interplay between public and private, and the role of electrical power in contemporary life. Four flat-screen monitors are installed vertically on the white walls of a small gallery; the technical apparatus of the installation is made visible, strategically drawing attention to the significance of electricity to the work.





The screens hang at different levels on the wall, and two cords extend out from each screen, disappearing into electrical boxes at the other end. Art and everyday life become cleverly intertwined in this work, which borrows the electricity from existing municipal amenities and appropriates it for use with personal appliances. The four-channel video installation shows a standing fan plugged into a WALK sign, a lamp connected to a streetlight, a space heater drawing power from an outdoor building light, and a speaker attached to a telephone line. Each domestic item is reliant on a corresponding public device. For example, the house lamp switches on only at dusk, when the streetlight flickers on. Hence, any failure in government sources of power renders the personal items defunct. In this superficially lighthearted installation, Zhou references individuals' lack of autonomy in China. Again, as in *One Day* and *Time in New York*, in *Power Here*, the artist uses simple physical gestures to examine the role of the individual in society.

Zhou Tao, *South Stone*, 2010, single-channel video, 25 mins. Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou.



South Stone, the installation in the front room of the gallery, marks a distinct shift for Zhou Tao into more complex terrain. The piece considers the inevitable tension between old and new within a globalized world through the lens of a village that has

been subsumed by the rapid industrialization of neighbouring Guangzhou. In the twenty-five-minute video component of the installation, the artist uses neo-realist techniques that blend documentary and fiction to portray the quiet futility of contemporary life. The village was once a thriving industrial area in the mid-twentieth century, and a trade hub for the Asia-Pacific, but over the last fifty years it has deteriorated to the point of decay. The angle of the camera moves from high to low, focusing on animals—mice, a turtle, stray cats, frogs, a dog—and industrial buildings. Occasionally people appear in the video performing the rote tasks of the day. Two young men in white T-shirts, jeans, and sneakers—the artist and a friend—often reappear, aimlessly wandering the streets.

One shot follows a turtle swimming through water swirling with prisms of oil pollution. The reflection of factory buildings in the glassy surface paired with the innocuous reptile struggling through the water introduces a central contrast in the video: nature in opposition to man. Even the stray animals in the video seem affected by the meaninglessness of the contemporary

Zhou Tao, *South Stone*, 2010, single-channel video, 25 mins. Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou.



Zhou Tao, *South Stone*, 2010, digital print, 20.3 x 27.9 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou.

condition. Dogs loll about on the ground while cats watch mice without ever making a move. This lethargy and futility are reflected in the behaviour of many of the characters who inhabit the film. A sleeping man falls off a bench without stirring, and a little boy with a yo-yo twirls in circles.

The photographs that accompany the video were taken by Zhou Tao while filming. The majority depict objects—vegetables, plastic bags, milk cartons, leaves—that Zhou Tao has inscribed with Chinese characters using a thick black marker, writing that contains narrative fragments contributing to a larger story. Other photographs are more straightforward landscapes and natural props from the video: shriveled gourds arranged in a line, a sweeping view of the village, the artist suspended from a tree. The prints allow the viewer to stop and contemplate certain visual elements of *South Stone*, and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the environment and the artist's reflections on it through text.

Through the writing inscribed on the objects, a tale begins to unfold of a massive ship brought to the area years ago for repairs. The texts describe the significance of the vessel, which “represented the frontier of cutting-edge industry and technology.” According to Zhou Tao's writings, the ship combined industry and agriculture, generating solar power and filtered seawater. However, the vessel is ultimately abandoned. The handwritten words explain that an MSG factory and a paper mill now operate in the hull of the boat, and the former agricultural crewmen live in the ship's cabins or rent them out to migrant workers. They continue to grow fruits and vegetables out of habit, although the pollution from the factory and the mill cause their produce to rot and become inedible. Gourds, a symbol of prosperity and longevity in Chinese culture, feature prominently in the video, but the fruits are always depicted as shriveled and unappetizing. The mythical ship becomes a metaphor for the loss of livelihood and purpose in the region as Zhou Tao expertly weaves together fiction and documentary in the installation.

Layers of time overlap ambiguously in *South Stone* as it conveys a yearning simultaneously for a prosperous past and a hopeful future while acknowledging the stagnation of the present. In his book *Cinema 2*, philosopher Gilles Deleuze introduces the concept of the time-image, a postwar transition in film that focuses on time rather than movement. The time-image is based in the crystal-image, which fuses an actual and a virtual image, allowing the coexistence of all sheets of past, present, and future.¹

In *South Stone*, the viewer sees glimpses of the very young and the very old, and the final words on an orange plastic bag read: “Just don’t joke around with time.” Like his better-known contemporary Cao Fei, Zhou Tao offers a reality that exists between truth and fiction, an interplay that is constantly reinforced by the accompanying text.

The writing on a piece of cardboard in one of the photographs references the ship in *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), Werner Herzog’s epic film that infamously included an army of local workers in Brazil pushing a ship over a mountain in the protagonist’s dogged quest for wealth through the acquisition of rubber. Ultimately, Fitzcarraldo’s blind ambition, symbolized by the ship, ends disastrously. This parallel to the imaginary vessel in *South Stone* suggests a similar failure fueled by greed. The allusions to futility in *South Stone* are subtle enough to evade a direct critique of politics, instead commenting on contemporary human existence.

The video in *South Stone* does not exclusively dwell on the morose, but also occasionally returns to the lighthearted territory of Zhou Tao’s earlier work. The artist and his friend perform spontaneous antics at various moments in the video. At one point, they try to squeeze shoulder-to-shoulder through a narrow passage; then one begins to throw found objects at his dodging friend. The use of humour to soften social critique is a technique used by other contemporary Asian video artists, such as the Xijing Men, who created a farcical sports competition to mock the 2008 Beijing Olympics, or Zhou Xiaohu, who, in his video *Concentration Training Camp* (2007–08), offers a scathing critique of corporate capitalism made humorous by the slapstick element of actors hanging from the ceiling in the performance. Similarly, Zhou Tao’s penchant for physical comedy keeps the viewer engaged without overshadowing the sociopolitical undertones of his work.

Within this small exhibition, the curator shows the progression of an emerging artist’s practice over the last few years. *Power Here*, *Time in New York*, and *One Day* rely on clever visual tricks to consider the tension between the personal and the communal. These three works are playful in their presentation and effective in their message, yet their simplicity leaves them lacking the depth necessary to thoroughly confront complex issues. Each video relies on a single idea to grapple with a complicated aspect of contemporary life. *South Stone*, on the other hand, demonstrates the growing sophistication of the artist as he explores a wide variety of subjects and learns to use the medium of video as a creative tool rather than just a means of documentation. With its layers of time, ambiguous reality, and striking shots, *South Stone* gives agency to the viewer’s interpretation, rather than offering an easy answer.

Notes

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: Time-Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 127.