

# KADIST

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photo courtesy Dr. Martin Hauser

## ***Robert Zhao Renhui: Flies Prefer Yellow***

Opening Reception: Wednesday, November 19, 6-9pm

Dates: November 19, 2014 – January 10, 2015

Gallery hours: Wednesdays – Saturdays 2-7pm, or by appointment

Resulting from his three-month residency at Kadist Art Foundation, *Flies Prefer Yellow* is the North American debut exhibition of Singapore-based artist, Robert Zhao Renhui (b. 1983). Featuring installation and photographic works, the exhibition explores boundaries, systems, neuroses, and control through the artist's encounters with one of the most inconspicuous insect species on earth—flies. Despite their ubiquity and adaptability (more than 145,000 species exist), flies remain nearly invisible to many humans. This dismissive outlook is attributed less to visual perception, and more to a psychological predisposition towards the insect's lack of purpose—a manufactured negligence that determines what we

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see and what we do not. Rendering the unseen visible, and the ignored critical, this multidisciplinary exhibition amplifies the intersections of insect and human, natural and urbanized environments, and entomology and art practice.

During his residency, Zhao made multiple visits to the Sacramento insect lab of Dr. Martin Hauser, Senior Insect Biosystematist at the California Department of Food and Agriculture (and longtime acquaintance of the artist's). Inspired by Hauser's scientific impulse towards exhaustive taxonomy, Zhao began observing and cataloguing insects. Ranging from beetle-tracking within the urban core of San Francisco, to collecting the various insect carcasses from his windshield during road trips, the artist began accumulating observations about the indigenous insects, and in particular, the flies he encountered. In addition to the flies themselves, Zhao's curiosity extends to the various traps and methods humans use to rid themselves of the pests. The exhibition's title, *Flies Prefer Yellow*, on the one hand refers to the artist's affectionate imagination through its anthropopathic tone, implying a desire to be friendly with the insects. On the other hand, the preference is actually a statistical observation as most commercial flytraps are produced in the color yellow. Through the lens of flies, the exhibition invites critical reflection on human's paradoxical relationships with animals and our organic world.

Through this collision with art, the insect world, long suppressed and diminished by the congestion and monumentality of urban life, is revealed in the full glory of its contradictions: the fly is both friend and foe, beautiful and repellent, known, yet never fully described. Through languages of humor, repetition, contradiction and juxtaposition, Zhao's practice negotiates the process of image making and the proximity of vision that continue to blur lines between objective documentation and fictional narrative.

On the evening of the opening reception, November 19 6-9pm, Dr. Martin Hauser will join Zhao and Xiaoyu Weng in conversation within a pop-up laboratory of his scientific materials and specimens. Monica Martinez, of *Don Bugito*, will serve edible insect appetizers alongside a special insect cocktail by Helena Keeffe.

## **ABOUT THE ARTIST:**

Robert Zhao Renhui (b. 1983, Singapore) investigates the relationship between man and nature, evaluating humans relationship with their environment, and revealing a delicate balance between the two. He often portrays nature as an unpredictable and mysterious force and works to illustrate the innate curiosity humans have about their own environment. Working primarily with photography, the artist adopts a multidisciplinary approach by presenting images and videos together with documents and objects.

Zhao closely tied much of his work to a fictitious research organization called the Institute of Critical Zoologists (ICZ). ICZ aims to develop a critical approach to the zoological gaze,

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i.e., how people view animals. Since 2009, Zhao has also been affiliated with The Land Archive (TLA), an organization revealing man's impact on his natural environment from an artist's perspective, focusing on the history and changes of the landscape of Singapore. Zhao received his Bachelor of Arts in Photography from Camberwell College of Arts in London. He was awarded a Master of Arts in Photography from London College of Communication. Robert Zhao has exhibited his work both locally and internationally in solo and group exhibitions. Recent work was included in exhibitions at the International Festival of Photography at Mineiro Museum (Brazil, 2014) the Singapore Biennale (2013), the Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore (2013), Format Festival (Derby, UK, 2013), Lianzhou International Photo Festival (China, 2013), GoEun Museum of Photography (Busan, Korea, 2013), Zabłudowicz Collection (London, 2012), Shanghart (Shanghai, 2012), and PPOW (New York, 2012).

## **ABOUT KADIST:**

Kadist Art Foundation encourages the contribution of the arts to society, conducting programs primarily with artists represented in its collection to promote their role as cultural agents. Kadist's collections and productions reflect the global scope of contemporary art, and its programs develop collaborations between Kadist's local contexts (Paris, San Francisco) and artists, curators and art institutions worldwide. Each year Kadist hosts international artists in San Francisco and Paris for extended residency periods. While traditional residency programs are organized in the style of a retreat, removing the artist from the commotion of urban life, the Kadist residency places artists squarely within the heart and history of the urban experience. Each resident is assisted in the production of a new work for public presentation. Exhibitions take place either at Kadist's own venues, or in partnership with another area art institution. Kadist residencies seek to bring international perspectives into conversation with local audiences, histories and culture.

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