

Third Realm

MARCH 31—MAY 17, 2020

GROUP EXHIBITION

THE POLYGON GALLERY

101 CARRIE CATES CT, NORTH VANCOUVER
TUE–SU: 10 AM–5 PM; M: CLOSED

CURATED BY DAVIDE QUADRIO

OPENING RECEPTION

SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 2–4 PM

Davide Quadrio will be giving a talk as part of the Capture Speaker Series on Thur. April 30 at 7 pm at The Polygon Gallery, followed by the Closing Reception of Capture Photography Festival (p. 111).



Xijing Men (Xijing Men, Tsuyoshi Ozawa, Chen Shaoxiong, and Gim Hong-sok), *This is Xijing—The Life of the Xijing Presidents (Urban Planning)*, 2008, c-print. Courtesy of the artist, FarEastFarWest collection, and Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago.

Third Realm

***Third Realm* showcases a crucial period of artistic production in Asia from 2004–2019. The exhibition features artists who use photography, film, installation, and performance to investigate liminal spaces. Spanning a range of cultural contexts, the works disrupt binaries of global and local, past and present, sacred and secular. Including artists predominantly from China, as well as Thailand, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia, and projects developed in Asia by international artists, *Third Realm* brings together artworks from across East and Southeast Asia. The exhibition features many seminal figures in the Asian art scene, among them Birdhead, Cao Fei, Heman Chong, Comfortable Collective, FX Harsono, Jompert Kuswidananto, Lu Yang, Sutee Kunavichayanont, Surasi Kusolwong, Gary Ross Pastrana, Paola Pivi, Sun Xun, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Xijing Men, Yang Zhenzhong, Zhou Xiaohu, and others.**

Most of the works incorporate elements of performance and duration, and are concerned with ritual. The time-based actions are related to Buddhism, in which it is the process of an action that inscribes it with sacredness. Similarly, in process-driven art, the practice of the action in itself carries meaning. The artists employ ritual acts in the broadest sense to uncover the third realms that lie within liminal conditions. The tension between secular and sacred ritual is made apparent in the photographs of Paola Pivi and Lu Yang. Paola Pivi (Italy, b. 1971) compiles a photographic archive of Tibetan Buddhist tulkus, the recognized reincarnation of previous Buddhist masters. Lu Yang (China, b. 1984), on the other hand, is more interested in conflating the secular world of science with religion; her pop culture-influenced videos present animated Tibetan Buddhist deities using the latest technology in brain mapping.

Several of the artists examine the performativity of ritual. Zhou Xiaohu (China, b. 1960) is interested in the various ways that performance can take on religious undertones. Using absurdist humour, *Crazy English Camp* (2010) explores the phenomenon of Li Yang, the founder of Crazy English, whose methods of teaching the language include shouting slogans from a pulpit in high-energy recitation. Zhou's video emphasizes the spectacle of these presentations,

and the associated fanaticism that borders on religious frenzy. Comfortable Collective (Jin Shan, China, b. 1977; Maya Kramer, USA, b. 1977; and Li Mu, China, b. 1974) is similarly concerned with critiquing institutions and group mentality, documenting a performance that slyly calls into question displays of national identity and group behaviour. FX Harsono (Indonesia, b. 1949) investigates his identity as an ethnically Chinese Indonesian by writing his name in Chinese characters in the rain, a meditative act that highlights the delicate nature of identity. Gary Ross Pastrana (Philippines, b. 1977) conducts an examination of selfhood using his own blood—which he literally forges with metal—in a work that explores the materiality of the body.

Other artists observe the ritual of everyday life, particularly the collectives Birdhead (Song Tao, China, b. 1979, and Ji Weiyu, China, b. 1980) and Xijing Men (Ozawa Tsuyoshi, Japan, b. 1965; Chen Shaoxiong, China, 1962–2016; and Gim Hong-sok, Korea, b. 1964). Taking diaristic snapshots that range from self-portraits to glimpses of a shifting urban landscape, Birdhead's photographs attempt to document urban life, fragment by fragment. Their approach incorporates a variety of images to represent the lives of urban Chinese youth during the early 2000s whereby the artistic action of documentation becomes, by extension, a



Zhou Xiaohu, *Vandalism portfolio* (detail), 1974-75 (printed 1993), gelatin silver prints. Courtesy of Dr. J. Patrick & Patricia Kennedy.

ritualized act. Taking a more satirical approach, Xijing Men present a fictitious city that revels in the absurd, creating a set of rules of city life to satirize Chinese social and bureaucratic customs. Singapore-based conceptual artist Heman Chong (Singapore, b. 1977) similarly upends social norms in his installation of a million solid black business cards scattered on the gallery floor. While business cards represent the rules and rituals that define capitalist exchange, the emphasis on the cards as physical objects on the ground points to the hollowness of ritual gestures. Yang Zhenzhong (China, b. 1968) highlights the empty ritual of photography itself. While his portraits of laughing subjects suggest an authentic reaction to an off-camera person or scene, they are actually staged actors photographed alone in a studio and thus hover between reality and fiction.

In this exhibition, such dynamics are also evoked as a means of exploring national history. In the titular piece *Third Realm* (2011) by Jompert Kuswidananto (Indonesia, b. 1976), unembodied figures in nineteenth-century colonial dress are arranged like phantoms in a configuration that suggests a religious rite with the underpinnings of a military exercise. In searching for modern national identity, the artist implies that a colonial past is inescapable, as history and the current moment tensely converge in a ghostly third space that is neither past nor present. Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand, b. 1970) and Sun Xun (China, b. 1980) also explore the residual effects of past national trauma. Weerasethakul does so through filmed reenactments, while Sun Xun draws on old newspapers, his illustrations purposely obscuring the official narratives of history.

Cao Fei (China, b. 1978) uses the third space of the digital realm to explore the unmaking of the self in the context of national identity. Using *Second Life*, an online game that emerged in the early 2000s, Cao Fei created the fictitious *RMB City* (2008-11), which stands as a critique of China's rampant consumerism, taking the name itself from the

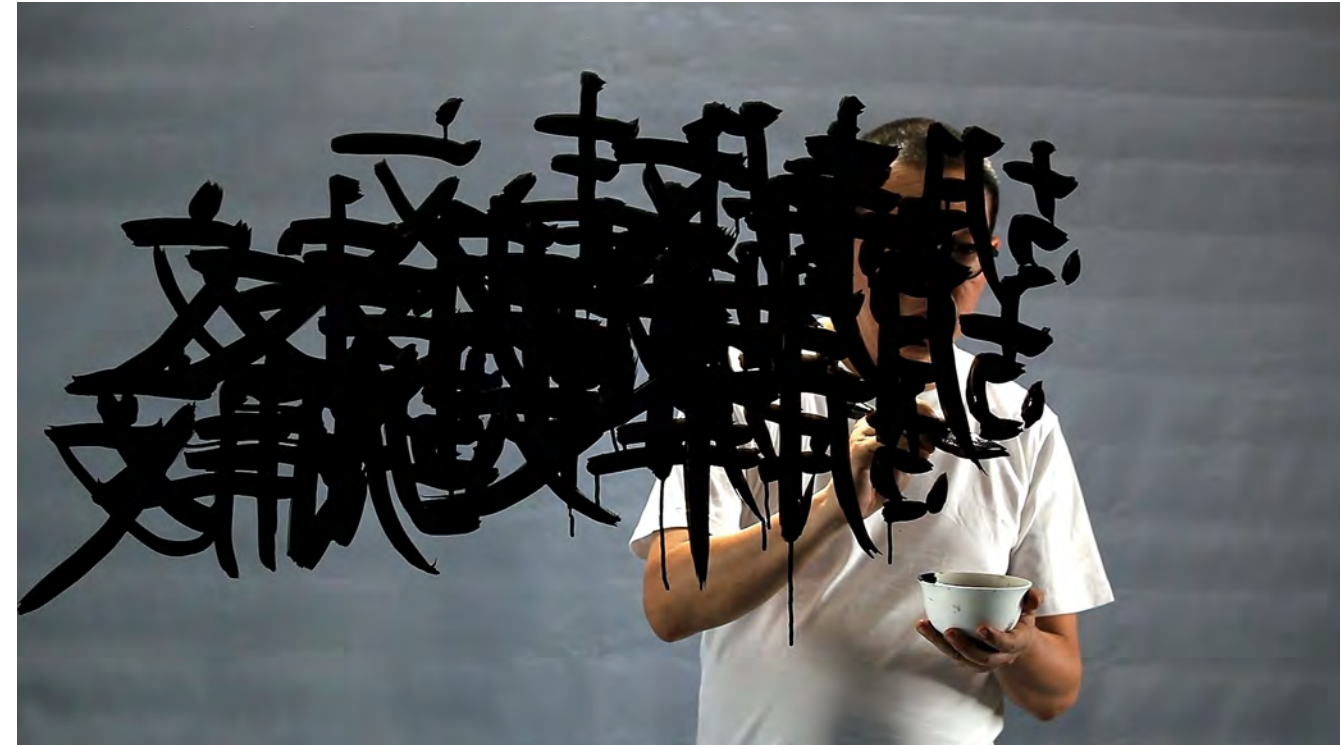
Chinese currency. Her performance of *RMB City Opera* (2010) underscores modern China's urban development and the related tension between past and present in a rapidly changing country. Sutee Kunavichayanont (Thailand, b. 1965) and Surasi Kusolwong (Thailand, b. 1965) also examine urban development and globalization, and its inherent threat to local culture—in their case, in their native Thailand.

The exhibition offers insights into the sociopolitical shift during the 2000s when Asia's economic prosperity began to command global attention. While often calling into question the limits of camera documentation and historical record, the artists exploit the directness of documentary images to reveal the complexities of hybrid identities and social change.

Third Realm is drawn from the FarEastFarWest collection, a Shanghai-based organization that commissions and acquires contemporary Asian artworks and is housed at the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College in Chicago.

FarEastFarWest was founded in 2007 by Eric Guichard and Davide Quadrio and serves as a production platform for artistic projects. The shared goal of its co-founders is to identify artists, select projects, and produce historic pieces that address contemporary issues relevant to life in Asia.

Third Realm is organized by the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College in Chicago.



FX Harsono, *Writing in the Rain* (still), 2011, video. Courtesy of FarEastFarWest collection.

Presenting Sponsor:



This presentation is part of The Polygon Gallery's exhibition series *New Perspectives: revealing diverse perspectives, untold stories, and new voices in visual art.*