

Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release



FOCUS SHANGHAI: Lu Chunsheng and Birdhead

Curated by Michelle Loh and Katy Martin

November 18 – December 18, 2010

Opening: Thursday, November 18, 6 - 8:30 pm

Curators' talk: Saturday, December 11, 3 pm

Thomas Erben Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of Shanghai-based artists Lu Chunsheng and Birdhead (Song Tao and Ji Weiyu). The exhibition features a full-scale projection of Lu Chunsheng's 90-minute feature, *History of Chemistry: Vol. 2 – Excessively Restrained Mountaineering Enthusiasts*. Also on view is a large photography installation by Birdhead, plus two short videos by Song Tao in collaboration with the musicians B6.

Combining an awareness of cinematic history, that derives in part from the glamour of the former *Sin City* and its influential film industry of the 1930s, with the groundbreaking work and teachings of media artist Zhang Peili in nearby Hangzhou, Shanghai has crystallized, over the past decade, as a center for media arts in China. Producing highly considered, provocative work in video, photography, installation and book arts, artists in the region form a loosely knit community (many collaborate on each other's productions) with artists such as Yang Fudong and the before-mentioned Zhang Peili as active influences.

Lu Chunsheng brings an absurdist's wit and a quirky sense of the surreal to *History of Chemistry: Vol. 2* (2006), a quasi-narrative that plays out within sweeping, post-industrial landscapes. Within these violated settings, Lu's lone protagonists enact a set of scripted, dramatic actions that never quite make sense. The film was produced during his residency at Gasworks in London, though Lu's stripped spatial sensibility (he was initially trained as a sculptor) transports the English setting into a global nowhere. Human tensions and drama are ambient elements of the unsettling landscape we inhabit: "I think that in this world there should be some extremely mysterious things. I am interested in the mysterious, not the strange."

Birdhead's project focuses on today's Shanghai, chronicling the experience of a generation, for whom the constant exchange of digital visual recordings of their everyday constitutes part of the social fabric. The photo installation is an excerpt from *Xin Cun*, Birdhead's recent book, which documents the two artists'

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neighborhood as it is being destroyed to make way for urban development. Shifts in scale and placement inflect a range of feelings – from playfulness to anxiety to somewhere in-between – conveying a tenuous hold and an oddly disjunctive sense of location.

In his video *Four Country* (2007), Song Tao records young friends immersed in the play of a game by the same name. The fluid, dance-like camera movement, underscored by B6's electronic soundtrack and combined with sophisticated editing, transforms an everyday scene into an intimate portrayal. *Three Days Ago* (2005), his second short video on display, documents a luxuriant Shanghai at night.

Lu Chungsheng's (b. 1968) *History of Chemistry: Vol. 2* is in the collection of the **Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art**, Oslo. It has been screened within major contexts including the **Victoria & Albert Museum** London (2009), **International Film Festival Rotterdam** (2008), **Central Institute of Fine Arts** Beijing, and the **Sao Paulo Biennial** (2006).

Over the past ten years, the artist's work has been exhibited in many major venues both in China as well as abroad: **ShanghART** Shanghai, **Centre Pompidou** Paris, **Ullens Foundation** Beijing, **Istanbul Biennial**, **Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo** Turin, **Serpentine Gallery** London, **Museum Boijmans** Rotterdam, **De Appel** Amsterdam, **Museum of Modern Art** New York, **Duolun Museum of Modern Art** Shanghai, **Hamburger Bahnhof** Berlin, to name a few. His previous work, *History of Chemistry: Volume 1*, was shown at **PS 1/ MoMA** in 2006, prompting **New York Times** critic, Holland Cotter, to comment: "In his work ... old and new China meet."

Birdhead is a collective of two artists, Song Tao (b. 1979) and Ji Weiyu (b. 1980), who both attended the same art school and have been collaborating on photographic projects since 2004. Their collaborative work has been exhibited extensively and numerous times with **Shanghart** and **BizArt Center**, both in Shanghai; it has also been included in many exhibitions surveying contemporary Chinese art.

Videos by Song Tao have been widely and internationally shown in important institutions: **Pinacoteca Agnelli** Turin, **Kunsthalle Bern**, **Duolun Museum of Modern Art** Shanghai, **Ludwig Foundation** Vienna, **Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art** Oslo, **Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo** Turin, **Hamburger Kunsthalle**, **Kunstmuseum Bern**, **National Museum of Contemporary Art Oslo**; as well as the **ShanghART** Gallery, Shanghai.

About the curators:

Michelle Loh is a New York-based art consultant specializing in organizing art fairs and group exhibitions as well as advising institutions and individuals in regards to collecting contemporary Asian art. Her most recent projects include *Trans-Realism: Contemporary Art from China* at **Christie's**. She was part of the founding team of the **Asian Contemporary Art Fair**, New York, 2007 and 2008, and the co-publisher of Art Asia Pacific from 2003 to 2005.

Katy Martin, a New York video and lens-based artist in her own right, has been involved with Chinese video art since 2005. Her intimate knowledge of the mainly Shanghai based scene led to her contributing regularly to **Yishu Shiji**, formerly China's leading art magazine, as well as to curated video screenings for such venues as **MoCA Shanghai**, **Anthology Film Archives** New York and **Pacific Film Archives** /University of California at Berkeley. She currently has a solo exhibition at **Drawer 158** in New York.

Gallery hours: Tue-Sat, 10-6. For further information and visuals, please visit www.thomaserben.com or contact the gallery at 212-645.8701.

Images: Lu Chunsheng, *The History of Chemistry: Vol.2* (2006), still from video (left); Song Tao, *Four Country* (2007), still from video (right).

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