

5 Questions with Cheng Ran , *Elephant*, Text/Emily Steer



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5 Questions with Cheng Ran

Text by Emily Steer

Following a three-month residency at New York's New Museum with K11 Art Foundation, Chinese artist Cheng Ran will show *Diary of a Madman*. "The whole exhibition will evolve around the strangeness of the exchange of language," the artist said as he worked on the residency, "constructing an incomprehensible story about New York."

What can we expect from your upcoming show at New Museum?

I plan to make dozens of videos in New York, from a few seconds to more than an hour long. It will, as a whole, be a part of my new work, the title of which is taken from Lu Xun's 1918 work, 'A Madman's Diary', China's first novel written in Modern Chinese. In the story, Lu Xun uses the 'madman' Ah-Q as the protagonist to analogise, question and reflect on reality.

Pigeons occupying the road in New York in the early mornings, garbage bags on the sidewalk, me reading Native American poetries, actors muttering questions in Chinese downtown... The whole exhibition will evolve around the strangeness of the exchange of language, constructing an incomprehensible story about New York. All works will be named like the streets in New York, e.g. *25 W135 E87 (a dove)*, not ascertainable nor verifiable with actual landmarks.

You work with a lot of well-known film material from the US, yet this will be your first time visiting and working in the country. How do you expect this might alter your perspective on the surrounding culture?



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In fact, there are a lot of language, poetry and movie elements in my work. Some of the influences are from the US, some are from Europe and Asia – they are actually very diverse. On top of that, my concerns are based on the intricate and distinctive personal situations under different cultural contexts. The variety of culture in New York opens more doors to this kind of creative process.

The real and the fantastical often meet in your work. Do you approach the subject matter differently when something comes directly from 'life' – or is it much the same for you?

I opt for a more detail-oriented approach to work. I don't want to see New York as the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building or Times Square. I would rather it to be a wine bottle, a window air-conditioner, or simply a phrase.

Can you tell me a little about your process? How do you begin work on a project, and do you have quite a structured idea about how it will materialise?

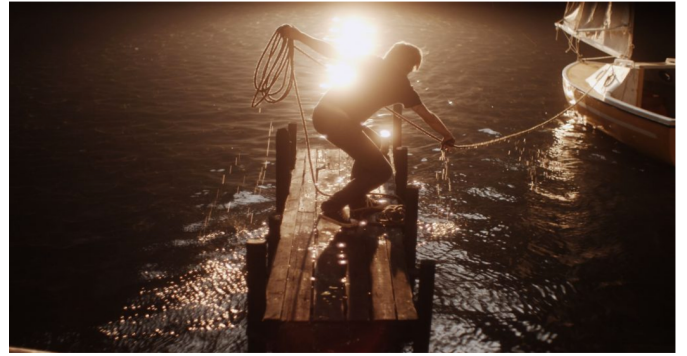
Most of the time, I don't have a set script nor preconception. The way I work is more like an adventure, to explore further possibilities through experience and concepts. For my stay in New York I think I will spend a month getting to know the city, walking to every corner instead of staying at the museum or studio. Usually, I take pictures and scribble spontaneously to document the ideas around me, ideas that are time and site-specific, inconceivable and unimaginable. Then I will look for appropriate ways to represent them as themes.

This residency has been designed specifically for young artists from China. Do you feel many aspects of contemporary art from China are under- or misrepresented in the west?

The question is too broad for me to comment on, but maybe that is the exact answer. For me, it is to conduct a more introspective exploration, breaking away from the dreary concepts of politics and boundaries, of the so-called oriental and western, in which I have no interest at all.

Speaking about the residency program, I think it's a very important turning point for K11 Art Foundation and the New Museum to welcome young artists to stay in the institutions. This represents a kind of change and establishes a platform for the world to focus on new creations, instead of artworks based on transboundary or political presumptions. I would like to express my gratitude to Adrian, Chairman of K11 Art Foundation, and Massimiliano, Artistic Director of the New Museum. I am grateful to be chosen as the Resident Artist of this program, which allows me to come to the US for the first time and have the chance to delve into the known and the unknown of this metropolitan city.

'Cheng Ran: Diary of a Madman' is at the New Museum, New York, from 19 October until 15 January 2017, following a three-month residency at the New Museum in partnership with K11 Art Foundation. All images Cheng Ran, In Course of the Miraculous, 2015, Video (still shot) Courtesy of the K11 Art Foundation.



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