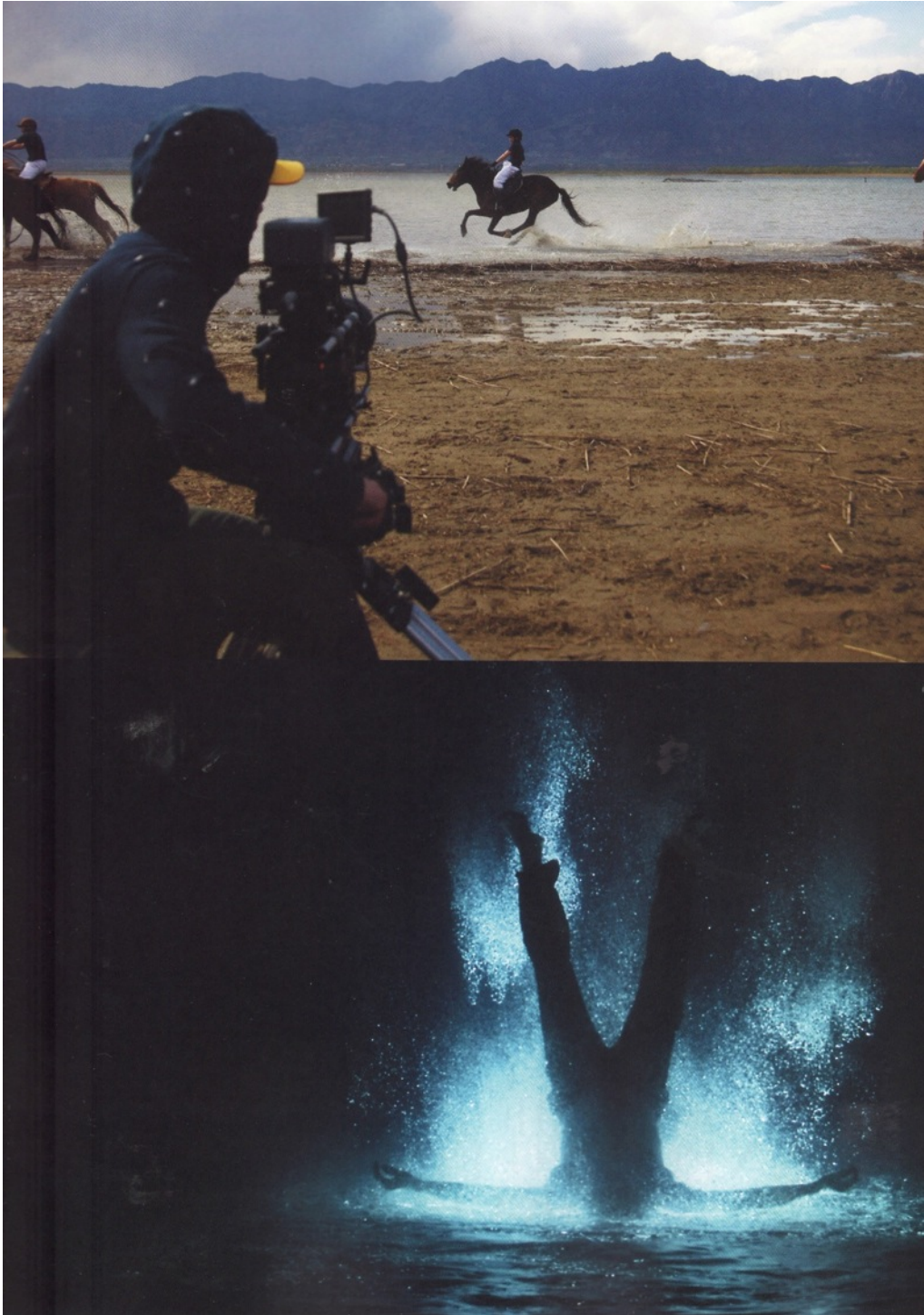


LEO XU PROJECTS

Kaleidoscope, *Exploring The Endless Possibilities Of Narrative, Language And Story-Telling*,
Mariagrazia Costantino, P48-49, Launch Issue, Jan 2015

KALEIDOSCOPE



CHENG RAN

49

BY MARIAGRAZIA COSTANTINO

Persuaded that nothing new can be really created, as information has already been covered in all possible directions, Cheng Ran, a 34-year-old artist from mainland China, decided to start from some “classics” and think new functions for them. So his early work *Rock Dove* (2009) recalls Hitchcock’s *Birds* (1963), and the more recent *The Sixth Angel for the Millennium* (2012) quotes Bill Viola’s *Five Angels for the Millennium* (2001). Cheng is obviously not afraid to manipulate existing reality, because what he can achieve from this manipulation is a version much closer to his own idea of reality. What the artist articulates through his survey in the realm of video is a parallel universe in which existing images, sound and voices—“video and audio readymades”—are converted into brand new works, calling into question the (abused) dichotomy of original versus copy(right).

Cheng’s works are not uncritical “copies,” but rather Baudrillardian simulacra that, while mocking the contemporary obsession for “authenticity” and originality, epitomize the disproof of certain preconstituted assumptions and a targeted rebuttal of ingrained visual habits. This approach requires an utmost clarity of aims and the careful consideration of how to use the work of others to gain a new access to one’s own work. Apart from pre-existing images and footage, the artist has also employed sampled sounds and excerpts from famous speeches: in the 2011 video *Cheewing gum paper*, silver paper balls scattered on the surface of a drum jump and move to the rhythm of the fragmented record of Martin Luther King’s speech “I Have A Dream,” seemingly forming, in the artist’s words, “a strange and lonely galaxy.” While he tries to trigger brand new visions by

Cheng Ran (Mongolian, b. 1981) lives and works in Hangzhou and Amsterdam. He is represented by Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne; and Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai.

A solo exhibition of Cheng Ran will take place at Galerie Urs Meile in Beijing from 24 April – 12 July 2015.

Mariagrazia Costantino is a sinologist, critic and curator. She currently works in Shanghai as artistic director at OCAT (OCT Contemporary Art Terminal).

Images:
Artist portrait shooting
Hot Blood Warm Blood
Cold Blood, 2011 (up)

Angels For The Millennium (#6), film still (down)
Courtesy of the artist;
Galerie Urs Meile,
Beijing/Lucerne;
and Leo Xu Projects,
Shanghai.

increasing (or exposing) the mystery behind insignificant objects or iconic images, Cheng is aware that the growing interest in visual culture derives from the pleasure provided by movies and similar products, but argues that all the “structures”—including cinema, music, literature, people—we use to achieve an understanding of the world are now going to engulf us: the process has actually already started, and “after the end of a 3D movie we don’t take the glasses off anymore.” The only remedy to this fatal indifferenciation consists in regaining control over films, something that can be done also by “expanding” their finales like in *This is the End* (2008). Fighting against the irreparability of a film’s ending is a revolutionary act implying the defeat of the distrust toward any possible change.

Cheng Ran’s exploration of the endless possibilities of narrative proves his deep fascination for language and story-telling: in *Before Falling Asleep* (2013), he staged four classic fairytales in modern settings, in order to preserve their meaning and function, re-evoking the experience of listening. One of his most recent projects was inspired by a spam received some time ago, and comes in two versions—one set in Amsterdam, the other in Shanghai—where two different female characters read the same email. Set in Shanghai, *Always I Trust* (2014) features actress Carina Lau: we hear her voice and read the subtitles, full of mistakes to recall a state of unrest; the actress’ gorgeous attires and suave movements are contradicted by the awkwardness of the email, so eventually the visual triumph of Shanghai’s landmark buildings and staggering vistas is turned into the confession of a personal failure. ☹

“EXPLORING THE ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES OF NARRATIVE, LANGUAGE AND STORY-TELLING”

HIGHLIGHTS 亮点

CHENG RAN

文 / 玛丽娅

程然

当确信不可能有什么新东西是真正创造出来的，因为信息已无所不及，程然，一位 34 岁的中国大陆艺术家，决意从某些“经典”入手，变个方子使用它们。他的早期作品《野鸽》（2009）回溯了希区柯克的《群鸟》（1963），较晚的《千禧年的天使(#6)》（2012）引用了比尔·维奥拉《千禧年的五个天使》（2001）。很显然，对于摆弄现存现实这件事程然毫无忌惮，因为这种摆弄过程带给他的版本更接近他自己对现实的看法。通过在录像领域的勘探，艺术家展现了一个平行宇宙，现存的图像、声音和声音——“视频和音频现成品”——在其中被转换成全新的作品，质疑着泛滥的原创对复制的二分法。

程然的作品并非不加批判的“复制品”，而是更接近鲍德里亚的“仿像”，在嘲弄时下执着于“真实”与原创的同时，集中呈现对某些预设的反证和针对视觉惯习的反驳。这种创作角度要求作者具有极度明确的意图，并能够缜密地思考如何运用别人的作品来打通自己作品的新的入口。除了现成的图像和影像片段，艺术家的素材还包括取自名人讲演的录音及选段的采样：在 2011 年的录像作品《口香糖纸》中，银色纸球散落振动着的鼓面，随着马丁·路德·金“我有一个梦想”录音片断的节奏抖动，形状仿若用艺术家的话说：“一个奇异而孤单的星系。”通过加深（或揭示）微小物体或标志性图像背后谜一般的特质，尝试着去激发崭新的视觉；

与此同时，他明白，人们对视觉文化日益关注的原因在于电影及类似产品提供的愉悦，但他指出，所有那些我们用来理解这个世界的“结构”——包括电影、音乐、文学、人——现在正要把我们吞没。这个过程实际上已经开始了，“一部 3D 电影的观看结束之后，我们不再摘下眼镜”。这种致命的无区分的补救措施之一就是重新夺回对影像的控制，某种类似《结局》（2008）中“延长”电影结尾那样的做法。抗拒一部电影结局的不可修改性，这是一种革命性的行动，暗示了对任何一种修改予以猜疑的落空。

程然对叙事的无限可能的探索表明他对讲故事和语言极为着迷：《在入睡之前》（2013）于现代场景中演了四个童话经典，目的在于保存它们的意义和功能，重新唤起聆听的体验。他最新项目之一的灵感来自他曾收到的一封垃圾邮件，这个作品有两个版本——一个场景在阿姆斯特丹，一个在上海——两个女性角色读着同一封信。以上海为拍摄场景的《信》（2014）由女星刘嘉玲出演：我们听到她的声音念着字幕，其中满是错误，以此勾连一种不安的状态；女演员华美的装束和优雅的动作与信的不自然相互抵触，最终，上海地标建筑和壮观全景带来的压倒性视觉变成了对个人的失败的自白。

