

Rijksakademie inside/out

With the Rijksakademie inside/out blog, the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten provides a platform for young writers to write about art. The posts will offer you a unique view of the Rijksakademie residency and its artists.

The Rijksakademie offers talented artists from all over the world the optimum circumstances to focus on deepening and accelerating their profession.

During the last weekend of November, the Rijksakademie will be open to the public for the annual event: RijksakademieOPEN.

For more information, visit the website: www.rijksakademie.nl

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April 3, 2014

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Meeting Cheng Ran in his studio

by Frederieke Beunk



Cheng Ran in his studio, photo by Frederieke Beunk.

Today I visited second-year resident Cheng Ran (CN, 1981) in his studio at the Rijksakademie. We sit down in two large old-fashioned armchairs. I look out on a year's study: a dozen parts of a deconstructed black grand piano are standing against the wall. On the ground lays a project Ran is working on: an assemblage of Dutch brochures and magazines from the Seventies and Eighties that he found by chance in some road trash. Ran can't read Dutch, but his assistant helps him.

Experiences Ran didn't have yet or skills he doesn't masters, fascinate him. Under the pseudonym Wojtowirycz Fog he has published the novel *Circadian Rhythm* (2013). It's a detective story in which he takes up motifs and quotes from his earlier works. According to Ran it is badly written, however it's not so much about the story. The work is meant to be a total experience in which you could read the book on a toilet in the exhibition space. During RijksakademieOPEN 2013 special excerpts from the novel with clues of the story were exhibited around the public toilets of the Rijksakademie. Ran is interested in the combined action of location and reading.



Cheng Ran, *Chewing Gum Paper* (filmstill), 2011, single channel video with sound, 3 min 10 sec, photo by Cheng Ran.

LEO XU PROJECTS

Ideas for his videos, installations and novels he finds in daily life, music, youth culture, and European art house cinema. In China, he spent days and nights with friends who play in a band. There his idea arose for the video *Chewing Gum Paper* (2011). First you hear the sound of a drum, then you see screwed up silver chewing gum wrapping papers and bouncing on the vibrating drum surface. Martin Luther King's four words from his famous speech 'I have a dream' (1963) resound repeatedly in a distorted and hypnotic way. The viewer very quickly gets a sense of recognition by the canonical words. By a second encounter, the serious undertone of the words seems a bit out of place in combination with the playful wrapping papers. Ran plays with the idea how sound can affect the way you look at an image and vice versa.

He is receptive to new ideas he gains from unfamiliar cultures, like the Dutch culture. As student at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, Ran became acquainted with Western art. Reading Western texts and theories, a new world opened up for him. China before 1989, the year in which modern Chinese art started to develop, is for Ran miles removed. He rather focuses on Western culture and finds it easier to translate it to a video work than Chinese culture. He rather focuses on what the European culture has to bring him during his residency, than relating to Chinese politics, as so many Chinese artists do who are well known in the West.

Ran's first-year stay at the Rijksakademie greatly affected his work and the way he reflects on it in different ways. In his work he concentrates on the experience of human interaction and the relationship of citizens to society. He lets himself be inspired by Amsterdam and its inhabitants. For hours he walked through the city and observes the daily habits and interaction of passers-by. He is interested in the story of the city and her inhabitants. When the sun is breaking through, he likes to go to the Oosterpark writing a novel or listening to musicians.

But also technical aspects of his work changed. Before his arrival at the Rijksakademie, Ran filmed his video with a digital camera. He had a lot of inspiring conversations with technical specialists and developed his technique in the media workshops. Here he learned how to work with super 16 mm film. Ran says in China it is almost impossible to work with this kind of film of the lack of special cameras and places to develop these films. Last year, he made seven new films, but he also expanded his work from video to other media such as installations, sound works and novels. He points out that the contact between the resident artists is very professional: there are a lot of in-depth discussions which made him look at his work in a renewed way. Ran: 'The atmosphere of the art scene here is quite different than the Chinese art scene.' Although the technical aspect of his work gained a high degree of development, for Ran the most important change becomes visible in the way he looks at his work and the new perceptions on his work which he has acquired during his residency.

This year he also would like to explore super 8 mm film. The idea for a new video came from the many junk emails everyone receives in his email box, but never reads. In his new video he would like to recite the emails as poems. In his coming novel he will focus on the effects of language barriers on his work and his communication about it. Despite his limited mastery of the English language, he's planning to write the book in English directly. Furthermore he would like to make a full length movie, currently he only makes short films. For his last residency year at the Rijksakademie Ran has still enough ideas.

More information you can find on Cheng Ran's [artist page](#).

1 NOTTIE | WEERGEVEN