

KALEIDOSCOPE



LIU CHUANG

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BY VENUS LAU

At his studio, artist Liu Chuang explains his research into *fangsheng*, an auspicious pattern formed by two overlapping diamond shapes that can be traced back to the Yuan dynasty. This pattern, now visible on China's ubiquitous anti-theft window grates "like a rejection laced with welcoming rhetoric," inspired the artist's new proposals for the tenth editions of the Gwangju and Shanghai biennales this fall. On the other side of the studio, piles of pulp romance novels sit on a concrete floor, held in place by colored stones that correspond to various texts on the wall: translated diaries, letters, poems and random addresses found on their dog-eared pages. Liu collected these paperbacks at rental bookstores in Dongguan, a city straddling manufacturing and prostitution—and the exchange of commodities and bodily fluids—where the artist spent a year running a factory after graduation. Circulated among workers, these doodles give messages to the strangers who open the books, creating an ethical asymmetry like the Derridian gift. Entitled *Love Story* (2006-ongoing), these monologues were recently presented along with abandoned books at Salon 94 (Freemans) in New York and Galerie Balice Hertling in Paris this year.

The circulation of objects outside of human use appears again in *Buying Everything on You* (2005-ongoing). The title says it all: the artist offered to purchase all the earthly possessions of people he encountered at open labor markets. Yet it would be too convenient to write off Liu's work as field research into the working class of the special economic zone established by Deng Xiaoping in Shenzhen: a geopolitical landscape channeled by the accelerated visual and linguistic produc-

Liu Chuang (Chinese, b.1978) lives and works in Beijing. He is represented by Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai.

Liu Chuang's work is currently featured in the 10th Gwangju Biennale, "Burning Down the House" curated by Jessica Morgan, through 9 November.

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Love Story, 2006-14
Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York

tion where the artist lived for six years. Liu's focus does not only latch onto people as specimens that illustrate living conditions under a (post-) Fordist culture; instead, he also concerns himself with systems and their mechanisms, including the noise that reveals the traces of the signal's operation, be it the architecture of language, capital or libido. In *Untitled (Unknown River)* (2008), folding furniture connects to a building's plumbing by pipes, the poetic connotations of the title functions as a murmur that mirrors the flow of fluid through a loop of banal objects designed to save space. In *Dancing Partners* (2010), a single channel video exhibited at Kunsthall Stavanger this summer, two identical cars slowly move side by side on a Chinese highway, compelling impatient drivers to try to pass them. On a shared road with people secluded in bubbles of portable private space, Liu stresses an ethical pressure that the legal system permits: the two cars are like white noise between two tracks on a vinyl.

Liu Chuang's works does not only hover over systems, but also continues into what extends from them spatially. This dialectic of interior and exterior often takes the form of architectural components. *Untitled (The Midnight Flights)* (2013)—exhibited at "ON/OFF" (2013), a large-scale survey exhibition of young Chinese artists at Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing—is inspired by the negative space of a swinging door. *Split Landscape* (2005), which flattens the cage-like anti-theft window grates that appear repeatedly in Liu's work, consolidates the passage between private and public spaces into a dysfunctional interface, a rejection articulated through a gesture of embrace. ☉

“SYSTEMS AND THEIR MECHANISMS, BE IT LANGUAGE, CAPITAL OR LIBIDO”

HIGHLIGHTS