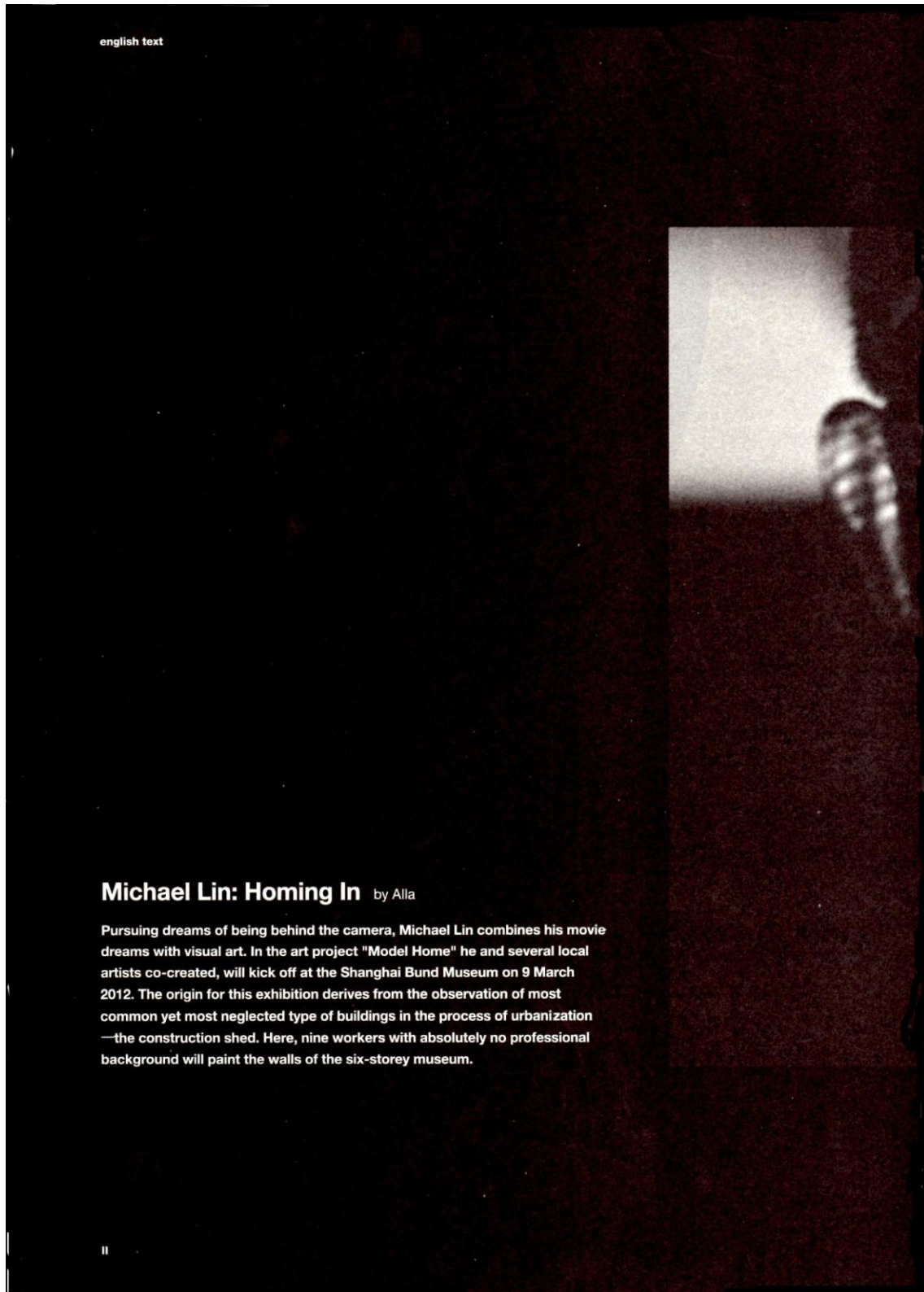


Numéro, Michael Lin: *Homing In*, text/Alla, Mar. 2013

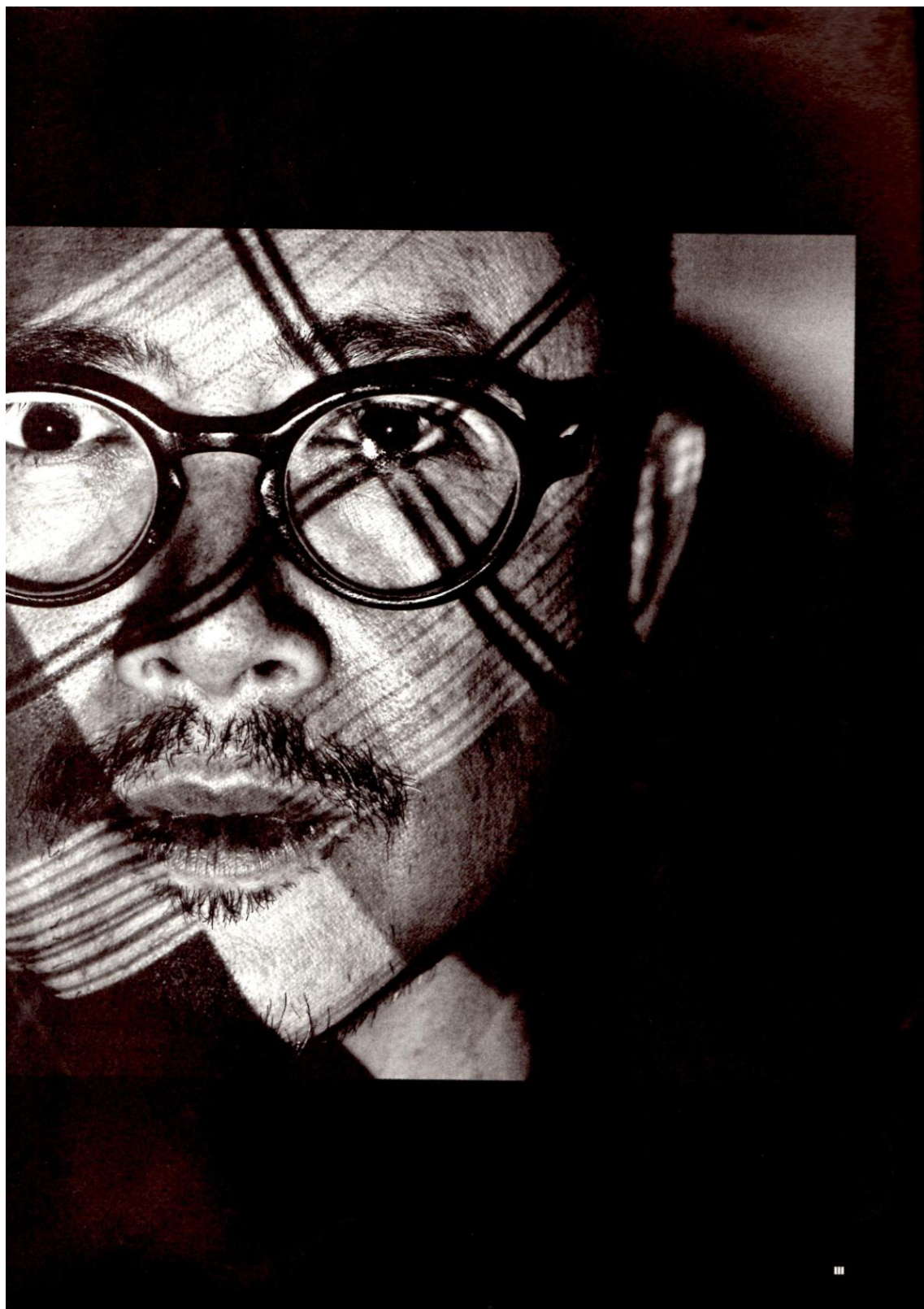
Numéro



Michael Lin: Homing In by Alla

Pursuing dreams of being behind the camera, Michael Lin combines his movie dreams with visual art. In the art project "Model Home" he and several local artists co-created, will kick off at the Shanghai Bund Museum on 9 March 2012. The origin for this exhibition derives from the observation of most common yet most neglected type of buildings in the process of urbanization —the construction shed. Here, nine workers with absolutely no professional background will paint the walls of the six-storey museum.

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Godard once said at the Cannes Film Festival: "If you understand, then I have failed to make it clear." Michael Lin's situation is somewhat similar to this. He's been constantly struggling to undo the perception of the proverbial "Taiwan grandma cloth painter", an impression 99 percent of people who know him associate him to. "What you see is the traditional cloth, but for me, my paintings are just non-representational patterns. I remain a realist; however, my art is abstraction, just like Godard." The subject of Michael Lin's graduation thesis at the American Art Institute was an interpretation of Godard's 80s work *Slow Motion* (*Sauve qui peut*): "I do not reject the public recognition of 'floral cloth painter', but my works actually contain more physiognomy," said Lin all those years ago. Since then, little, it seems has changed.

He comes from a family from Wufeng, and later immigrated to the United States at age nine. In 1993, he packed up and returned to Taiwan with a Master's degree in Fine Art from the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. It was then the peak of Taiwanese folk culture. Now, the artist, an expert at acting and self-direction will hold a premiere of his new film *Model Home* at The Bund Museum on 9 March. The inspiration behind this exhibition derives from observing the most common yet most neglected type of building in the process of urbanization — the construction shed, the idea borrowed from Walter Gropius' *Bauhaus Manifesto*: "Let us therefore create a new guild of craftsmen without the class-distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsmen and artists... It

will combine architecture, sculpture, and painting in a single form." "I've always relied on teamwork," Michael Lin explained, "My purpose for this exhibition is to stress on the idea of 'cooperation'." He wrote in his "script": To build four construction camps with other architects along the museum front gate to provide housing for the workers. He and the other nine workers, all with absolutely no professional background, will paint the walls of the six storey building (the most common construction worker's quilt patterns) in a progressive manner. The second floor will recapture images of Soviet avant-garde artist Alexander Rodchenko's "Workers Club" in 1925. It will be furnished with Hans J. Wegner's improved furniture ('cooperation' structure in color-coded screws), and the space will be provided to Tongji University and Japanese Atelier Bow-Wow's cooperation project *Made in Shanghai*, for conference, lectures, and presentation purposes.

In addition to "Architecture, Sculpture and Painting", "ambitious" Michael Lin also invited local musician B6 to play the theme song for this grand project, B6 will compile his works into a CD along with the works of three other local musicians, launching it under the same title as the exhibition. Meanwhile, the place will also screen the video work of local recording artist Chen, Ran's, with the preparing process of the exhibition as the subject. The exhibition pushes the envelope, broadening the boundary of painting to installation, space, architecture, music, video and performance to a whole. However,

this is not Michael Lin's debut work since his arrival in Shanghai. In 2008, his project *Another Day* turned the Shanghai Gallery of Art into a "grocery store", an idea people are still talking about today. "When I was in Taiwan, I used traditional cloth as a dialect to interact with the locals; and in Shanghai, I am also trying to find a local dialect to communicate with Shanghai and the city's audience."

Lin is a steadfast believer of Borges' view that real art is about observing life in full range, depicting ambience and articulating events.

Numéro: Many people who see your cloth works for the first time would say, "Isn't that traditional cloth? Can that be considered as art?" Did you have such self-doubt when you first exhibited your work?

Michael Lin: Actually, at every exhibition, and even now and then I would question myself: "Is this indeed art? Can I do this?" I initially did monochrome paintings on steel boards at school, like car painting jobs, I completely subverted myself when I started doing cloth painting. When I exhibited my works at the Yitong park, I even brought the carpet from my house, and took my home stereo to play music, people would gush "What are you doing ah? What are you painting ah? Such a weirdo!" But I have always been a stubborn person; I will not admit my mistakes no matter what, because in the end, I am always right.

Returning to Taiwan in 1993, from monochrome steel boards to traditional floral cloth... do these reflect self-identity

issues on a deeper level?

Of course, the recognition of identity can't be avoided, but this is a way too complicated a proposition. I grew up overseas, and then returned to my own country. My grandfather lived in their ancestral home at the Wufeng monuments, I was involved in the maintenance project of the historic site as well — for a full two years, I was watching it on site, and it was a familiar yet strange feeling. At that time, traditional cloth can be seen as a representation of my facing my own traditions; they are folk patterns, even totems. Ever since I started to paint on cloth, I've found a common language to communicate with the locals. Traditional cloth is like the concept of "folk housing" in architecture, such as Huizhou style in Anhui, and tube house in Fujian. They are geographical features which linked closely to the local climates, social customs, and natural resources.

At Palais de Tokyo in Paris, why did you set up your work upside down?

As you can see, I did it on purpose. A lot of people believe I paint flowers, that I am a painter of realism. I don't get why people always think I paint flowers, because I know deep down that I am heading towards abstraction. In my view, all I draw are just patterns. The work at Palais de Tokyo was also a type of Taiwanese traditional cloth, it has direction when it's made into children's bedspreads, so I deliberately reversed it, to stress its abstract nature, and that I do not care how it's presented.

Then do you have a specific way of presenting abstraction?

No, it's very tricky. I used to paint my own

pillows, and you can see the edges of pillow cases, are they representational or abstraction? To me, they are just patterns. Therefore, I've been trying to merge the distinction of representation and abstraction. Well, my art is abstraction, but I am a realist, because what I say is related to reality.

Just like in 2008, for the exhibition of *Another Day* at the Shanghai Gallery of Art, you "reconstructed" it into a grocery store, and it seemed very realistic.

Moving to Shanghai and surrounded by a new environment, I was faced with the same old problem of how to communicate with my environment. I lived in an old building at Xiangyang South Road at the time. As the only foreigner there, I was very curious about life in the neighborhoods. The neighborhood grocery store was like a "street museum", and all of my neighbor's merchandise can be found there, it was justifiable for me to go there. Moreover, I believe that this kind of family-run grocery store will no longer exist ten years from now. It has no packaging, no advertising, no showcases, and yet it has that intrinsic local identity in a unique economic environment. This inspired me to want to buy it, using its goods as an exhibition. At first, my staff got coaxed out of the idea by the owner, I told him to use the owner's language to communicate, for example, we want to shoot a movie, and there happened to be a grocery store in the movie and we need to buy everything in his store in order to shoot the movie. As a result, he agreed, and with a bag of cash, six people wrapped up everything in three truck loads. In order to demonstrate a relationship between body and objects of daily life, I

hired two circus performers to choose any commodity to juggle as they like, and filmed it. We also built an exactly same grocery store in front of the exhibition gallery, to play the video we've filmed, allowing people to see commodity in another form. That's how I adapted and communicated with the local environment.

The editor of *Purple* magazine in France once said, "There are more designers who do art than artists", and yet you've done a lot more designing works than art works, how do you look at the relationship between art and design?

I never cared about crossing the so-called line. I said I am a realist—art and design are both in my field of work, therefore I will not put a limit. In my opinion, that's how artists survive in today's society. Romantic artists only emerged after the 19th century, and before that, many painters' diaries would record entries about how much bread to buy, what salaries to pay their assistants and other trivial things. Being an artist is a profession, he is a participant of the society, unlike the idealists, those who put themselves outside of the society, and criticize the society with what they considered as right. I am not one of them, I am involved in the community, I admire the Bauhaus movement, constructivism as such concepts that directly involve the community. So in the past few years, I have designed furniture for Moroso, the Louis Vuitton store in Taipei, coffee mugs and packaging for Illy.