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Paris 6
47 rue Saint-André-des-Arts
5 rue du Pont de Lodi
6 rue du Pont de Lodi
Paris 8
28, avenue Matignon
London W1K 4HR
51 Brook Street
+33 1 56 24 03 63
www.kamelmennour.com

SHEN YUAN
PRESSE / PRESS
(selection)

PARIS

Shen Yuan

Galerie Kamel Mennour / 11 décembre 2015 - 23 janvier 2016

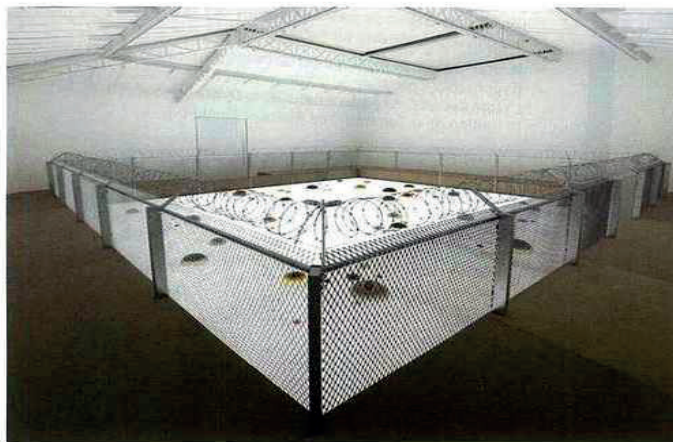
La nouvelle exposition de Shen Yuan porte un regard pertinent sur le règne vivant. Sans hiérarchie, les humains, les animaux, les végétaux et même les continents sont envisagés sur un pied d'égalité. L'exposition s'ouvre par une œuvre disposée au sol : au-dessus de grands tessons de verre reposent des éléments en porcelaine blanche dont la texture rappelle celle du papier froissé ou celle de la neige piétinée. *Dérive* fait allusion à la fonte des glaces, au lent mouvement d'un continent en voie de disparition. Plus loin, au mur, une série de dessins intitulée *Face et Profil* figure d'étranges visages. L'artiste revisite les codes d'identification anthropologiques ou policiers où l'individu est photographié de face et de profil. Ici, le visage prend la forme d'une pomme de terre. Elle commente de manière ironique les méthodes de fichage, de classement et de surveillance. Une notion qui structure l'imposante installation *Étoiles du jour* autour de laquelle nous sommes invités à nous déplacer pour surplomber une cour pénitentiaire bardée d'un grillage surmonté de barbelé. Sur un sol lumineux, d'étranges regards nous observent attentivement. En reproduisant les yeux de différentes espèces animales en résine, Shen Yuan nous interpelle : qui surveille qui ? Qui est enfermé ? Elle ouvre le champ migratoire et écologique à de nouvelles problématiques, telles que l'altérité ou les rapports de domination entre les êtres vivants. En mettant à mal une hiérarchie déterminée par l'Homme, elle nous renvoie à notre propre statut au sein d'un règne dont nous ne sommes pas les maîtres.

Julie Crenn

Shen Yuan's new show takes a lucid look at the kingdom of living things. There is no hierarchization; for her, animals, plants and even continents are all equal. The exhibition starts with a floor installation in which white porcelain objects sit on top of glass shards. Entitled *Dérive* (Drift), they have the texture of crumpled paper or trodden snow. The allusion is to the slow drift of a disappearing continent. On the wall is a series of drawings entitled *Face et Profil*, frontal and side views of strange potato-like faces. The artist is revisiting the identification codes in anthropology and police mug shots. This is an ironic comment on the way people are classified and put on file or under surveillance. The same concept structures the imposing installation *Étoiles du jour*. Visitors walk around and look down on a prison yard surround by a barbed-wire-topped fence. On the glowing floor are strange eyes that observe us attentively. With her resin reproductions of the eyeballs of different species of animals, Shen Yuan asks us: who is watching whom? Who is imprisoned? She opens the issues of migration and the environment to new problematics, such as alterity and the relations of domination among living beings. In upending the hierarchy as determined by humans, she reminds us of our own status in a kingdom where we are not the masters.

Translation, L-S Torgoff

« Étoiles du jour ». 2015. Caisson lumineux, résine, fil de fer barbelé. 0,10 x 8 x 8 m. (J. Joubert & F. Seixas). *Lightboxes, resin...*



Shen Yuan

Née en 1959 dans la province de Fujian, en Chine

// Born in 1959 in the Fujian province, China

Shen Yuan est une artiste chinoise qui expose dans le monde entier et connaît une reconnaissance internationale. Après avoir œuvré au sein de l'avant-garde en Chine, Shen Yuan décide de rejoindre son mari, l'artiste Huang Yong Ping, à Paris. Désormais, sa création sera marquée par cette expérience de l'exil et de la mélancolie qui en découle.

Quatre ans après son arrivée à Paris, elle expose l'une de ses œuvres les plus puissantes : *Perdre sa salive*. Des grosses langues de glace installées dans une cave fondent peu à peu, laissant apparaître leur ossature – des couteaux braqués vers le spectateur. Shen Yuan avoue avoir beaucoup souffert de la barrière de la langue à son arrivée en France. Cette langue, membre faible, mou, gustatif, qui s'épuise à parler et perd sa salive, devient donc une arme, violente, agressive.

Les installations de Shen Yuan conservent ainsi cet aspect subversif et dénonciateur, avec un côté kitsch, joueur, malicieux. Le spectateur s'amuse autant qu'il s'interroge. Dans chacune de ses œuvres, Shen Yuan pose un regard critique et dénonciateur sur cette culture et ce système dont elle est issue et irrémédiablement empreinte. Elle détourne sa propre culture et, sans la renier, l'expose tout en la jugeant. L'artiste s'engage et prend ainsi sa liberté à travers une œuvre poétique et surprenante, qui ne manque pas de susciter la curiosité du spectateur face à ces installations grands formats.

Dans le cadre de l'exposition *Shanghai!*, Shen Yuan propose *Crâne de la Terre*, une météorite ou planète lunaire dont les infractuosités recèlent des buildings miniatures. Avec de très grandes dimensions, cette œuvre joue sur le rapport entre microcosme et macrocosme, en proposant un objet à la fois évocateur de la nature sauvage et de la pierre à l'état brut, mais aussi de l'urbanisation massive et du développement des gratte-ciels qui viennent se nicher dans cet environnement minéral. L'artiste livre ainsi un constat juste sur l'évolution progressive de la société contemporaine en Chine et notamment à Shanghai, où ruralité et urbanité s'entrechoquent et s'absorbent.

Shen Yuan is a Chinese artist who exhibits her works all over the world and enjoys international acknowledgement. After having worked in the Chinese avant-garde circles, Shen Yuan decided to join her husband, the artist Huang Yong Ping, in Paris. From then on, her creations would be marked by the experience of exile and the melancholy that is linked to it.

Four years after arriving in Paris, she exhibited one of her most powerful works: *Losing One's Saliva*. In a basement, large tongues made of ice slowly melted, progressively revealing their hidden structure – knives pointed at the audience. Shen Yuan admits having greatly suffered from the language barrier when she came to France. This tongue, although it is weak, limp, gustative, and tires itself out talking and wasting its saliva, can also become a violent and aggressive weapon.

Therefore, Shen Yuan's installations present a subversive and denunciatory aspect, combined with a kitsch, playful, and jocular tone, so that the audience has as much fun as it questions itself. In each of her works, Shen Yuan uses her eye to criticize and denounce the culture and system she comes from, and which has left an irreversible mark on her. She twists her own culture around and, without actually disowning it, exposes it through her judgement. The artist thus commits herself and gains freedom by creating a strikingly poetic body of work, the large-scale installations of which never fail to arouse the public's curiosity.

On the occasion of the *Shanghai!* exhibition, Shen Yuan proposes *Skull of the Earth*, a meteorite or lunar planet with miniature buildings rising up from its crevices. With its monumental dimensions, this piece plays on the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm, by proposing an object that evokes wild nature and its rough stone, as well as massive urbanization and the construction of skyscrapers, which can be seen here, nesting in their mineral surroundings. The artist also gives an accurate statement on the progressive evolution of contemporary Chinese society, especially in Shanghai, where rural and urban aspects come together and absorb one another.

Crâne de la Terre
2011

Pierre et ciment / stone and cement – 220 x 220 x 220 cm
Vue de l'installation / View of the installation Musée Cernuschi / Parc Monceau, Paris

© Shen Yuan, ADAGP, Paris, 2012. Photo : Fabrice Seixas
Courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris



SHEN YUAN

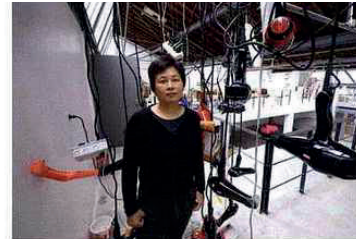
Née en 1959 à Xianyou, Chine
Vit et travaille à Paris

Représentée par la galerie Kamel Mennoun Paris



[...] Ce qui intéresse Shen Yuan, c'est la transformation d'une image en une autre – la glace devenant un couteau menaçant –, la réinvention du pouvoir des mots et la découverte de leur autonomie. Elle invite chacun à expérimenter le décentrement du sujet, la perte et le glissement de sens. Or l'incertitude est une notion que la culture occidentale redoute, rejetant l'obscur et le flou du côté de la maladresse, de la méprise ou de la folie. La traduction langagière ou culturelle travaille sur un sens incertain, "inachevable" puisqu'elle circule entre deux cultures, révélant leur écart afin d'exprimer le monde autrement, sous d'autres formes, rythmes et couleurs. Seul le rapport au sujet dans son historicité permettra la saisie de la signifiante.

Extrait de l'article de Soko Phay-Vakalis paru dans le n° 28, mars-avril 2009



Crâne de la Terre, 2011, pierre et ciment, 220 x 220 x 220 cm. Vue de l'installation, Musée Comuschi / Parc Monceau, Paris, 2011. Courtesy de l'artiste et de la galerie Kamel Mennoun, Paris

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CONTACTS

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EDITOR/PUBLISHER

Sarah Callaghan
The Asian Art Newspaper
PO Box 22521,
London W8 4GT, UK
sarah.callaghan@
asianartnewspaper.com
tel +44 (0)207 229 6040
fax +44 (0)207 565 2913

ADVERTISING

Jane Grylls
tel +44 (0)20 7300 5661
jane.grylls@royalacademy.org.uk
Kim Jenner
tel +44 (0) 20 7300 5658
kim.jenner@royalacademy.org.uk

SEND ADVERTISING TO

Asian Art Newspaper
P O Box 22521
London W8 4GT
United Kingdom
info@asianartnewspaper.com
tel +44 (0)20 7229 6040
fax +44 (0)20 7565 2913

ART DIRECTION

Gary Ottewill
Editorial Design
www.garyottewill.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER

Heather Milligan
info@asianartnewspaper.com
tel +44 20 7229 6040

SUBSCRIPTIONS

AND ADMINISTRATION
Asian Art Newspaper
P O Box 22521
London W8 4GT

United Kingdom
info@asianartnewspaper.com
tel +44 (0)20 7229 6040
fax +44 (0)20 7565 2913

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Shen Yuan



SHEN YUAN AND WORKERS (centre) in Italy during the making of Polkilotherm

THE INTERNATIONAL market is now full of Asian art with the number of artists having far outgrown what art critics could have ever anticipated 15 years ago. Surprisingly, the Chinese contemporary art scene in China is almost exclusively driven by men, and this discrepancy is even more visible at the international level where there are less than half a dozen female artists working. Shen Yuan (b. 1959) may not be the best-known name in the field when it comes to Chinese contemporary art, but for insiders, she is one of the leading advocates of avant-garde art. She left her background in traditional Chinese painting in order to explore the possibilities of installation. For two decades, Shen Yuan has not stopped transposing her life experiences into an art project. Since 1989, she has been based in France and has followed the metamorphosis of the Chinese artistic landscape from its first steps in 1979 with the Star Group's first exhibition in a Beijing park to today's blossoming market.

Shen Yuan represented China at the last Venice Biennale with a large installation, which gave her the opportunity to show that her work could be as interesting and challenging as that of one of her better-known male counterparts. She discusses her work and career with the Asian Art Newspaper.

ASIAN ART NEWSPAPER: While in China you painted in a 'traditional' way. Today, you are known as an installation artist and photographer. Was this a gradual transition?
SHEN YUAN: While still in China, I taught at the Central University, where I gave classes in classical Chinese art. My background was in traditional Chinese painting. Whilst China was slowly beginning to open up, many artists ended up in two worlds: one at school with the artwork that was created for the professor; the other during our free time, when we were studying books, foreign magazines, and we were trying to do something else. It was at this time that I began using ink in a more contemporary way. I started to do some installations, not many, but I guess I was venturing into what is commonly known as 'contemporary art'. Once I reached France, I really devoted my attention to contemporary art – working mainly in installation.

AAN: Currently, there seems to be a tendency to come back to ink painting, more specifically, to traditional painting. With your background in classical painting, would you consider coming back to ink painting in a contemporary way or is that chapter behind you so that you can focus on installation, sculpture, and performance?
SY: Yes, that is all behind me. I think I completed the cycle once I finished my studies of classical painting at the university in Hangzhou. More and more, I was moving towards contemporary art, even more so since being in France.

AAN: Do you personally see a future for contemporary ink work considering the quality of these classical works?

news in brief

be devoted to the art and culture of Asia through cross-cultural themes such as religious texts, textiles, ceramics and tea. To explore themes that characterise Asia and its exchanges with other parts of the world, the museum is organising *Confluence: Exchanges in the Making of Asia*, a three-day international conference in Taipei from 20 to 22 May. Proposed panels to be discussed will include: Routes of transportation, trade and transmission in cultural exchange; The manufacture, consumption and markets of products in cultural exchange; Images of self, identity and others in cultural contacts; The challenges and responses to such exchange; The formation and changes in the notion of Asia. For more details please contact the museum.

Confluence: Exchanges in the Making of Asia is at the National Palace Museum, 221 Chih-shan Road, Section 2, Wai-shuang-hsi, Taipei 11102, Taiwan from 20 to 22 May www.npm.gov.tw

NEW APPOINTMENT IN CONSERVATION AT FREER AND SACKLER GALLERIES, NEW YORK

Blythe McCarthy has been appointed the Andrew W. Mellon Senior Scientist in the Department of Conservation and Scientific Research at the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. McCarthy, who has worked as a scientist at the galleries since 1998, is responsible

for administering the conservation science section of the department, which conducts research on works of art primarily in the Freer and Sackler collections. She assumes the role held by the late John Winter, a 35-year Smithsonian veteran of the department until his retirement last spring. Winter was highly respected for his research on East Asian painting and scholarly contributions to the field of conservation. In her previous role as a conservation scientist, McCarthy studied the materials and techniques used by artists in the creation of works of art as well as special problems encountered in the conservation process. Her primary research interests included technical analysis of ceramics, glasses and pigments; the study of degradation mechanisms in materials; and the application of nondestructive testing techniques to museum objects.

ONLINE SOUTHEAST ASIAN CERAMICS CATALOGUE

The Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery recently launched the first online catalogue of the museum's collection featuring Mainland Southeast Asian ceramics. The address is <http://SEAsianCeramics.asia.si.edu>.

Spanning 4,000 years, the museum's collection highlights historical ceramics made in or traded to Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Burma. The

catalogue includes multiple colour images and detailed texts, a library of commissioned essays and translations, a bibliography of more than 1,300 citations and an introduction to ceramic shards housed in the Freer Gallery Study Collection. An interactive component invites commentary from archaeologists, curators and collectors worldwide. The online catalogue will expand to include all 900 ceramics in the Freer and Sackler collections as well as new discoveries, essays and commentaries.

Unlike a printed book with a single linear order of information, the online catalogue allows Web users worldwide to learn about earthenware and stoneware vessels through the triple vantage points of materials, place of production and time.

Nearly 800 of the ceramics featured in the online catalogue are from the Hauge Collection in the Sackler Gallery. The collection was donated to the Sackler between 1996 and 2005 by brothers Osborne and Victor Hauge and their wives Gratia and Takako. Osborne and Gratia Hauge first collected ceramics in the late 1960s and early 1970s while living in Bangkok, Thailand, and Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), Vietnam. During these years they were visited by Victor and Takako Hauge. In the late 1940s, Victor began collecting Japanese ceramics made in the 'folk craft' style, or *mingei*. In 1978-79, Victor and

Takako prepared the exhibition and book *Folk Traditions in Japanese Art*, organised and circulated by the International Exhibitions Foundation in cooperation with The Japan Foundation. Their awareness and appreciation for unglazed stoneware vessels within the Japanese tea ceremony prepared them to respond with spontaneous sympathy to similar vessels in Thailand and Vietnam.

The online catalogue also features ceramics from the Freer Gallery collection of Southeast Asian ceramics. That collection includes three pieces acquired by founder Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919) during the first two decades of the 20th century as Japanese tea ceremony utensils. Only in recent years have they been reidentified as imports from Southeast Asia to Japan. This collection has grown to include more than 100 pieces through generous gifts by Dean Frasché, Dorothy Slak and other donors, as well as through purchases.

PS1, NEW YORK

Alanna Heiss, the founding director of PS1 Contemporary Art Center, who over the course of the last 37 years oversaw the transformation of a turn-of-the-century public school building in Long Island City, Queens, into a space that reflected the originality and independence of hundreds of artists, retired in December 2008.

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ERRANCE IMMORTELLE (2008) red clay, reclaimed objects, photos printed on plastic tarpaulins, 200 x 700 x 200 cm.

a shoe of the Ming dynasty where women's feet were banded to make sure they would not grow. With that practice, women were really considered as objects, and they were supposed to stay home and not go out. The other shoe used is from the Mao period: women were expected to be part of society, to go to work without any type of accessories. With that piece, I am addressing all women, and not just the Chinese woman. Globally, the situation of woman has clearly improved, even though the problems still remain.

AAN: In many fields, women are expected to accomplish twice as much as men in order to gain recognition. Do you feel it is the same being an artist?
SY: I do not know specifically about that. I can only tell you that I do work an enormous amount, and in order to succeed, one needs a lot of strength. That is just the way society is. We need to make more effort.

AAN: With the success of the Chinese contemporary art market, many of your colleagues are dividing their time between Europe or the US and China. What about you?
SY: They are not in the same situation as I am. I tend to go back to China for a specific exhibition or to produce a piece as the production costs are definitely more affordable than here in France. Also, it is much easier for me: in China, I know precisely where to find certain stones. Generally speaking, however, I am in France most of the time.

AAN: Today, some of the commercially most successful artists have studios that operate like factories. What are your thoughts on the topic?
SY: That is a choice each and every artist has to make. I could also do the same, but I am not interested in it. I know that money is important, but it depends on the approach of the artist: does one so desperately need so much money?

AAN: At university, do people talk about your work – more so – as you are one of the few female artists?
SY: I think that in China I am not very well known. I do not think that they discuss my work at university; they probably discuss artists that are more successful than I am. That certainly also has to do with the fact that Chinese contemporary female artists are, generally speaking, not as well known as their



LEFT AND BELOW: UNCOMFORTABLE SHOES
(Elles sont parties pourtant elles n'ont nulle part où aller). An installation using women's shoes from two different periods of China's history.

All exhibition images from Le Degré Zéro de l'Espace, Kamel Mennour, Paris. © Shen Yuan Photo Marc Domage. Courtesy the artist and Kamel Mennour



male counterparts. That may change some day, but for now, that is how the situation is. In addition, there are still many universities where I find the curriculum to be quite traditional. They are beginning to talk about contemporary art, but it is only the beginning.

AAN: Your husband, Huang Yong Ping, is also an artist. Do you influence his work, and vice versa, does he have a strong influence on your projects?
SY: Although we are aware of one another's work, we keep a distance from each other for work. We help each other, but rather as an assistant would help

AAN: You have created an installation *Errance immortelle* addressing the issue of ecology in a place (China) where the situation seems quite dramatic (and desperate).

SY: The photographs for this piece were taken in the village where I was born. Today, that village is getting the all discarded waste from the surrounding areas. I think that the situation has simply become unbearable. That is why the last time I returned to my village, I decided to take some pictures so that I could then create an installation to bring attention to the problem.

'I create a special relationship with a space and then I develop an idea in conjunction with that space ...'

AAN: Similarly to your installation at the Venice Biennale in 2007, some of your installations are created to be outdoors.

SY: I create a special relationship with a space and then I develop an idea in conjunction with that space, its size, etc. That is what happened in Venice: first, I saw the space, and then I got the idea. The topic of the adopted children came up a few years ago, as I had a show in Spain where a couple just adopted a Chinese girl. I was wondering about their choice since Spain was not short of children to adopt! In addition, I remembered being in a hotel in Guangzhou where there were hundreds of foreign couples that were all in China in order to adopt a child. That image really shocked me, and pushed me to create a work about the adoption of foreign children from a very different culture. Also, once these children were adults, I was told by many parents who adopted a foreign child that they were facing some problems because of the different nationality, the different culture, etc. I used many pictures that I took in that hotel in Guangzhou where these foreign couples were staying. There are all types of transactions taking place: parents who want to get rid of their handicapped child, parents giving away their child for adoption simply for financial reasons. Although the situation in China has improved dramatically, there are still certain parts of the country that have to deal with poverty, and there are still people that are needy and decide to abandon their children. Of course, it is quite difficult to get exact data on the subject. While I was working on that piece, I was prevented from taking pictures, talking to people, etc. Many of the pictures were taken while hiding. As I am myself an immigrant here in France, I was of course quite sensitive to the problem of Chinese adopted children going abroad in order to be with their parents.

AAN: From where do you get your inspiration?

SY: My source of inspiration is my personal experience as well as the daily news. Living abroad, I have a different view on things than if I were to be living in China or if I were a regular French citizen. Often by living in one country, one accepts as normal certain situations that are intolerable, and shocking. Whenever I am in China, I see something new, and whenever I come back to France I see certain aspects with new eyes.

AAN: Why do you think Americans and Europeans are so fond of Chinese contemporary art?

SY: Unfortunately, art is always related to politics and to the economy. There used to be a time when art could be labelled as 'pure'. However, that has disappeared today, and Chinese contemporary art remains very much linked to the political and economical situation.

AAN: Looking back on your career, are there some key figures that were a great influence? Even if their influence cannot be recognised in your work?

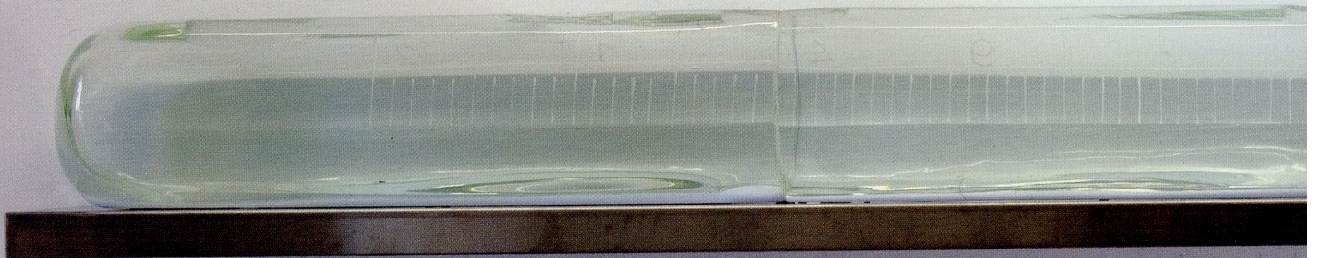
SY: I cannot name one specific person. Sometimes, I could read a book, and one single sentence would be the starting point of a new project. Even looking at the work of other artists or taking a walk outdoors could provide me with a whole new vision and trigger an idea.

OLIVIA SAND

ARTISTE

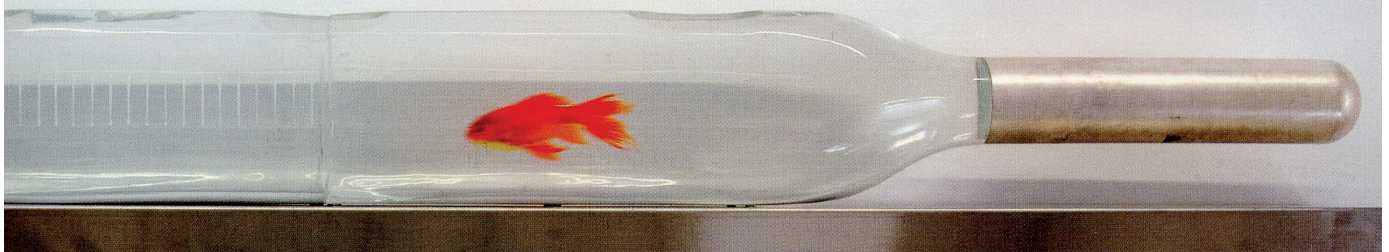
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SHen yuan, ou BRISer



La GLACE DE L'EXIL

PAR SOKO PHAY-VAKALIS



Ayant quitté la Chine en 1990, Shen Yuan fait de la cassure de l'exil le commencement – en lieu et place du vide – d'une transmission à venir, d'une œuvre discursive au carrefour de l'histoire, de l'art et d'une identité transculturelle.



L'exil s'abat sur un être avec soudaineté et brutalité à la mesure de l'insouciance que cet attachement pour son milieu d'origine a ébranlé à jamais. Un monde, une langue dans laquelle il évoluait se dérobe et l'isole dans la solitude. Une vie entière donne à méditer sur ce moment de brisure où se recroqueville l'essentiel et sur cette expérience intime de la perte, de la disparition et de l'absence. Même 19 ans après son arrivée à Paris, Shen Yuan n'a eu de cesse d'in-

terroger l'errance, la survie et les épreuves langagières. Empreintes d'une douce dérision subversive, ses étranges installations qui allient des matériaux bruts et éphémères, voire des organismes vivants, nous invitent à l'inconfort inhérent à tout rite d'initiation extraterritoriale et transculturelle. En témoignent son exposition et sa performance à la galerie Kamel Mennour l'automne dernier : *Le degré zéro de l'espace* – en hommage à Roland Barthes qui prô-



naît l'économie du langage, la simplicité des formes comme élan poétique et politique – qui évoque tour à tour la survie, la barrière de la langue et la difficile acclimatation dans un milieu étranger.

Le soir du vernissage, Shen Yuan s'est retirée du public en se rendant invisible et inaccessible derrière deux parois de glace, entourée seulement de quelques objets rudimentaires (un fauteuil en bois, une table, des bobines de fil et un téléviseur qui viendra relater sa performance). De part et d'autre du mur de glace se confrontent deux univers différents et non superposables : d'un côté, des voix résonnent de loin et sont perçues comme autant de mots incompréhensibles ; de l'autre, une vague silhouette se dessine à travers la glace qui fond doucement. Combien de temps faudra-t-il attendre le dégel pour "rompre la glace" ? Le *ground zero* renvoie tout autant au choc thermique de l'être humain qui éprouve des difficultés à s'acclimater qu'au refus d'échanger dans une salle d'exposition, lieu habituellement dédié aux flux communicationnel et financier. S'isolant de la rumeur

du monde, Shen Yuan a passé la nuit à broder la couverture de différentes phrases comme "Émigrer, c'est fuir un espace, ou chercher à occuper un autre espace. Je parle encore ma langue maternelle de l'époque à laquelle je suis partie. Elle a changé, et moi je suis restée. L'art me permet de franchir ces limites dans l'espace et le temps" ou encore "La langue des immigrants est comme la langue des serpents : enroulée →

Double page précédente :

Poikilotherme. 2008, installation : thermomètre en verre de Murano, eau et carpe koï, 302 x 18 x 22 cm.

À gauche :

Perdre sa salive.

1994, installation : 7 x 4 x 1,2 m, 9 langues glacées, 9 couteaux (détail).

À droite :

Paroles brèves. 2008, installation : 80 sèche-cheveux et tissus, dimensions variables.



et fourchée. La même langue parle deux langages et ne parle pas clairement comme le serpent qui siffle". Ce dernier énoncé renvoie à une installation sonore constituée de 80 sèche-cheveux suspendus au plafond par leur fil électrique à hauteurs différentes. De façon aléatoire et en ordre dispersé, ils s'enclenchent en faisant s'étirer par leur souffle des langues en tissus multicolores. Ces "paroles brèves" et rapides s'épuisent à trop parler et témoignent de l'incompréhension et de l'impuissance à se faire entendre, tant leur bruit est assourdissant.

Tout exilé éprouve la douleur de tous ceux qui sont privés de langage, précisément parce qu'il confère la "légitimité d'être": la langue dite "maternelle" qui nous est donnée sans réserve aucune depuis notre naissance pour raconter, décrire le monde, devrait donc être immédiatement accessible. Pourtant, il n'y a pas d'appareillage aussi complexe et étanche que le langage, qui dresse des barrières aussi difficilement franchissables aux yeux d'une personne qui n'a pas la chance de "naître dedans". C'est pourquoi toute acquisition de parole dans la langue de l'autre constitue un effort de pensée, de recomposition et de réappropriation de soi après le déracinement. Shen Yuan a fait de cette expérience de la privation langagière une œuvre des plus puissantes exposée dans une cave en 1994 : *Perdre sa salive* où se déploient neuf langues géantes glacées qui finissent par s'égoutter dans les crachoirs,

laissant apparaître leur ossature – de grands couteaux aiguisés. Elle joue sur la polysémie de la "langue", considérée à la fois comme système de communication et comme organe charnu, gustatif et sensuel, avec ses ambivalences, métaphores (mou, tranchant, blessant) et expressions ("saliver comme un chien" ou "quelqu'un qui perd sa salive est un homme faible" selon un dicton chinois). Par ailleurs, ce qui intéresse Shen Yuan, c'est la transformation d'une image en une autre – la glace devenant un couteau menaçant –, la réinvention du pouvoir des mots et la découverte de leur autonomie. Elle invite chacun à expérimenter le décentrement du sujet, la perte et le glissement de sens. Or l'incertitude est une notion que la culture occidentale redoute, rejetant l'obscur et le flou du côté de la maladresse, de la méprise ou de la folie. La traduction langagière ou culturelle travaille sur un sens incertain, "inachevable" puisqu'elle circule entre deux cultures, révélant leur écart afin d'exprimer le monde autrement, sous d'autres formes, rythmes et couleurs. Seul le rapport au sujet dans son historicité permettra la saisie de la signification.

Par ailleurs, le malaise ressenti (notamment dans l'utilisation des créatures vivantes comme les poissons chez Shen Yuan) vient de notre "épreuve de l'étranger" face à un art qui ne véhicule pas les mêmes valeurs esthétiques ou de semblables habitudes et héritages culturels. Toute traduction ne se heurte-t-



elle pas au même paradoxe d'une "équivalence sans adéquation", pour reprendre une expression de Paul Ricœur ? C'est à ce complexe d'hétérogénéité que l'œuvre étrangère doit sa résistance à l'interprétation univoque. En outre, l'acte de création est au cœur de l'interstice d'intraduisibilité et de la temporalité indéterminée de l'entre-deux. Dans cette perspective, l'artiste à l'instar du traducteur fait vœu de fidélité et de trahison, procédant à un certain sauvetage et à un certain consentement à la perte. Le deuil d'une culture absolue est nécessaire pour accepter l'écart dialectique jusqu'à l'acceptation de la différence indépassable du propre et de l'étranger. Dans *Essai sur l'exotisme*, Victor Segalen avait compris un siècle auparavant les risques des fausses alternatives, les dangers de la fusion qui n'est qu'un mode d'appropriation et d'homogénéisation de plus : "Les grands raccourcis d'espace, la chute des barrières doivent se compenser quelque part de cloisons nouvelles, de lacunes imprévues." Toute subversive qu'elle soit, la traduction culturelle reste avant tout une visée, une ligne de fuite, toujours ouverte à la reprise selon la nécessité des changements, des contextes historiques ou socioculturels. En témoigne une très belle œuvre de Shen Yuan, *Uncomfortable Shoes*, où une centaine de petits chaussons noirs courent le long des murs, effleurant à peine le sol. De loin on y déchiffre un message : "Elles sont parties, pourtant elles

n'ont nulle part où aller." Ces chaussures rappellent différentes époques de la Chine : la dynastie des Qing, pendant laquelle les codes esthétiques imposaient aux femmes de bander leurs pieds dès leur plus jeune âge ; la révolution culturelle qui uniformisait le style (même couleur noire, sans distinction d'âge) ; enfin notre époque contemporaine avec ses flux migratoires où des milliers de femmes quittent leur pays pour des lendemains meilleurs et qui finissent pourtant dans la solitude et le dénuement. La légèreté et la grâce de cette installation sont à la hauteur de l'exil infini et des tragédies de l'histoire.

Par une pratique de la métaphore, Shen Yuan dénonce également les conséquences dramatiques provoquées par les décisions radicales des pouvoirs politiques chinois, à l'instar de *Ventre de pierre* – un immense aquarium sculpté avec des poissons multicolores – qui représente le désastre qu'a entraîné la construction du barrage des Trois-Gorges. Pour *Errance immortelle*, elle a suspendu à une corde à linge des clichés photographiques de grand format →

Uncomfortable shoes

(Elles sont parties pourtant elles n'ont nulle part où aller).

2008, installation : chaussures chinoises, dimensions variables.

Vue de l'exposition "Le degré zéro de l'espace", galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris.

ARTISTE

63

(artabsolument)

ARTISTE

64

(art)absolument



montrant son village natal, devenu méconnaissable à présent tant il est envahi par les rebuts et les déchets d'une société qui peine à réguler ses ambitions et conquêtes de puissance et de richesse. Au-dessous défilent d'étranges volatiles en matériaux recyclés sur une bande de terre craquelée qui évoque une langue ancestrale desséchée...

C'est dans ce mouvement ininterrompu de circulation, faite d'errance "positive", que Shen Yuan puise les ressources créatrices d'un art transculturel qui abolirait l'opposition rigide de l'Occident et de l'Orient pour une meilleure appréhension des mutations sociétales, des bouleversements politiques et écologiques à l'ère de la globalisation. Loin de toute revendication d'une identité artistique chinoise, Shen Yuan n'a cessé d'œuvrer pour un espace en devenir – propre au vide médian du taoïsme – dans lequel chacun pourrait

redistribuer le champ des possibles entre l'art et la vie. Aujourd'hui, l'enjeu serait de définir une éthique de la traduction culturelle ou identitaire qui ne viserait plus l'intégration ou l'assimilation de l'autre (car tout sujet est changeant dans son historicité), mais la construction d'un vivre-ensemble avec le droit à la différence dans l'égalité et la tolérance. ■

À gauche :

Le degré zéro de l'espace.

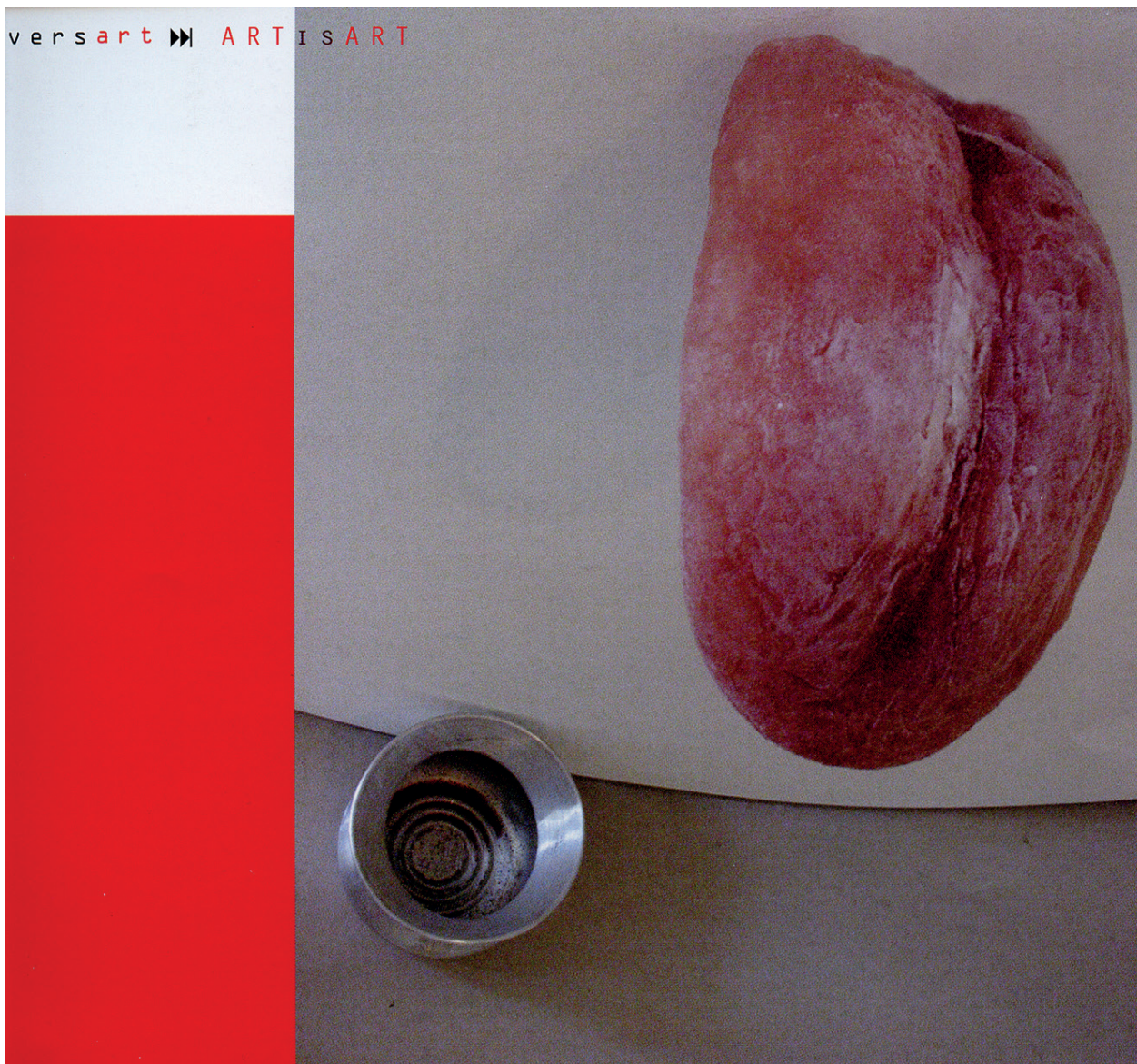
2008, performance galerie Kamel Mennour.

À droite :

Errance immortelle.

2008, argile rouge, matériaux de récupération,
photos imprimées sur bâche plastique, 200 x 700 x 200 cm.

vers art ►► ART IS ART



Shenyuan, *Perdre Sa Salive*, Galerie Kamel Mennour.

Par ailleurs, si les ventes de Londres et de New York, au printemps et à l'automne, font elles aussi parties intégrantes du calendrier du collectionneur, une tendance récente – que d'aucuns considèrent comme perverse –, consiste dans le rapprochement financier entre certaines galeries et maisons de ventes, c'est-à-dire entre premier et second marché. Les ventes et les achats purement spéculatifs semblent alors permis à tous les niveaux.

L'ENJEU SPÉCULATIF

Tout ceci esquisse la silhouette d'une bulle spéculative que pourrait faire éclater un simple déséquilibre. Mais il faut aussi compter avec la puissance des pays émergents, des collectionneurs russes et chinois prêts à investir beaucoup d'argent dans une œuvre, des places plus marginales mais indubitablement présentes que sont Dubaï ou Abu-Dhabi, de l'Inde aussi – quoique plus autarcique en art –, et de l'Amérique latine.

Le marché de l'art ne serait-il qu'un vaste leurre ? Quelle authenticité dans la création lorsqu'un artiste est formaté pour entrer sur le marché, ou qu'une revue d'art comme *Frieze* est à l'origine de la foire du même nom ? Peut-il encore exister un art underground qui ne soit aussitôt happé par le maelström du marché ?

Il serait inutile de diaboliser à l'excès un milieu qui, en dépit de ses effets pervers et de ses délits d'initiés, est avant tout constitué d'individus passionnés. De nombreux faits rassurent, telle l'existence de tendances résolument hors normes – l'école de Leipzig –, d'artistes qui s'imposent en dépit de leur marginalité, de collectionneurs et de mécènes pour qui une collection est un enjeu vital, de quelques critiques d'art ou curateurs parvenant, même face à l'hégémonie financière, à faire entendre leur voix. Si des artistes créent et si des collectionneurs achètent, c'est d'abord parce que l'art est objet de désir. En tant que tel, il dominera donc, en dernière instance, toutes les sirènes de l'argent.

✶ Anne Malherbe

挖掘慣常思維的另一種可能

專訪中國藝術家沈遠

文 | 謝西·布恩 (Cécile Bourne) 翻譯 | 連苔嵐 圖 | 沈遠

沈 遠一向藉由歷史及寓言探討她與日常生活的關係。透過將實物非實用性的再處理亦或反之而行，她挑戰了既有的習慣觀念及其價值本身。以這相異二者為起始點，她總是談諧而不帶有預想地創造出某種東西。在這十多年的創作過程中，沈遠也時常以她的角色作為動力，在國際來往中面對她所選擇的體制提出疑問及批評。這幾年來，她重新在中國展出她的作品，在幾個大規模的展覽開展前，我想專訪這位藝術家。對許多人而言並不是那麼瞭解她的作品，然而在2001年巴黎市立現代美術館「巴黎中轉站」展覽中，她的作品卻已經受到矚目。以下是訪談內容。

問 巴黎大皇宮「藝術的力量」展覽，策展人侯瀚如邀請你參加展出，並選用了去年在波孟畫廊 (Galerie Beaumont Public) 展出的作品《巴黎——盧森堡之旅》，為什麼會選擇這件作品？

答 當畫廊請我為他們做一個展覽時，我立刻想到盧森堡的特殊背景。不管是開車或是搭火車，在旅行中，我常要接受搜身檢查，因為做為一個中國人，會被懷疑是否與洗黑錢有關。因此在這樣的背景之下，我決定轉換情境，複製一輛屬於自己的汽車——車身側面裝有許多口袋和拉鍊，像是用來隱藏現金鈔票。我覺得侯瀚如選用這個作品，並利用這個非常正式的場合，把它從盧森堡運到巴黎，是以一種很戲劇性的方式來總結目前法國藝術家的政治和社會地位。



沈遠《南嶺史 (由南嶺當地婦女書寫)》·裝圖·1100x1000x150cm·2005。

問 你同時也在盧森堡參與了「橋下：蜿蜒的河流」展覽計畫。

答 《長城與樹同生》(2005) 這件作品是將全世界最大的堡壘中國長城和全歐洲最小的國家盧森堡的堡壘相互聯繫，把這兩者規模不同，但卻相似、既矛盾又和諧的力量進行錯位對換。對我而言，長城就像是攀爬於山脊的根莖。在盧森堡的計畫中，在堡壘附近的拼貼玩具 (長城) 攀爬在橋下一棵百年老樹上，選擇灰色積木的原因，是因為它呼應了長城的方石塊和盧森堡城裡的堡壘。在去年的廣東三年展中，我也做了一件類似這個主題的作品《南國長城》，在屋頂上製作小房屋的模型是廣州的一種民間傳統藝術，像是記錄房子的歷史一樣。這件作品反映了今天地產商和對地方記憶之間不公平的抗衡，我特別想強調這個失衡的階級關係，尤其是一些微小、對大規模事物毫無價值的東西。

問 透過這種層級互換的方式，你轉變了觀眾的視角：我們不能再以一貫的方式來看待這些象徵物？

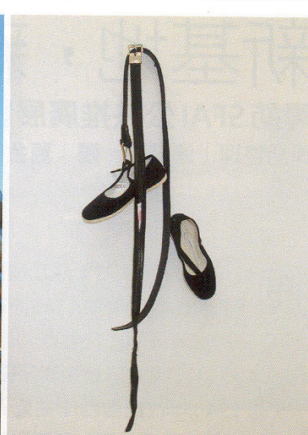
答 如果說中國的長城已經建造了兩千年，其本身的過程亦說明了中國的問題。這個非常具有組織的浩大工程，同時也是一部平民史。他曾被摧毀，又數度修復，他也將幾千人的生命置於危險之中，直到現在亦然。這是中國人生命的象徵：中國人總想保護自己而置外於世界，就好像一些古老的居住型態。在傳統封閉的老建築當中，僅有一扇小小的門做為入口，比方說我在中國的南方家鄉福建就是一例。

問 你常借用一些形式來建立人與其生活方式習慣，而且常常是一種游移的概念？

答 2001年在魁北克當代藝術中心，我做了一條船，因為我的生活經歷與遷移緊緊相連 (如同法國和英國一樣，中國也有其深刻的殖民歷史)。這條船是用一些炒菜鍋做成：我選擇這個鍋子的原因，是因為中國人不管到何處都會保留他們的飲食習慣。作品也伴隨著中國民謠歌曲，唱送著遠行、再生……

在布里斯托 (Bristol) 我以這個城市仰賴奴隸致富的歷史為背景，也做了一條船。這條船擱淺在滿地的鹽海裡，在鹽上放了些用當地特產的藍色玻璃做成的魚骨和藍色玻璃器皿，它們是由我和當地的工藝師一起製作的。藍色對我而言，是死亡的顏色，亦是死後再生的概念。

問 在金夏沙 (Kinshasa)《圓環》計畫裡，你以香蕉葉為底而做成的一條船，是否可以談談這件作品和概念？



左：沈遠《跳床 12345》·塑膠、棉·1000x1000x50cm·2004。沈遠在五個充氣跳床上，縫了紐約、巴黎、倫敦、舊金山和利物浦等五個城市裡的中國城地圖。下圖為中國城地圖局部。中：沈遠為西班牙「NMAC 自然當代藝術基金會」所做的作品，使用中國與摩洛哥的陶瓷，建造一座維多利亞式的橋。這座橋剛好位於歐、非南北樞紐，呈現了建築裝飾及融合中國式與阿拉伯安達魯式的瓦器風格。這是一個不可通過的橋，隱喻了文化的可溝通與不可溝通性。右：沈遠《巴黎——盧森堡之旅》（局部）·裝置·300x500x150cm·2005。圖為車身側面所裝設的許多口袋和拉鍊設計。

答 當然！想像力可以創造無限的可能，即使是以蕉葉做成的一艘船，我和當地一群八歲的孩子一起做成各式各樣的交通工具：卡車、汽車、救護車、小船、木筏等等，同時我又重新找到用極少的預算做成一件作品的可能，就好像我小時候那樣：在中國的1950年代末期，那時我們也是一無所有。

問 橋也是你作品的象徵物之一，占領空間的一種方式、一個關係嗎？

答 在一個荷蘭小城——萊登（Leerdam）的村莊裡，我受邀在戶外創作一件作品。那裡的一間工廠每四年都會邀請藝術家用他們的玻璃製品創作，我用他們市裡的回收桶和他們製造的啤酒瓶製作了一座只供觀看的吊橋，這座吊橋讓酒瓶看來很輕盈，而且符合回收桶的功能。

問 就像是你在西班牙「NMAC 自然當代藝術基金會」的作品一樣？

答 概念同樣是透過藝術造形的方式來連結不同的文化：使用中國與摩洛哥的陶瓷，建造一座維多利亞式的橋。其典雅而不實用的樣式，正好說明了當代社會本質上的矛盾，即是在交流體系下僅僅認識且相互滲入彼此的文化。這座橋剛好位於南北樞紐，正是因為創作地點處於歐洲最南邊緣、距北非摩洛哥僅幾公里的海岸。這座橋呈現了建築裝飾及融合中國式與阿拉伯安達魯式的瓦器風格。這是一個不可通過的橋，隱喻了文化的可溝通與不可溝通性。

問 未來幾個月，你會有一些展出，作品和觀眾之間會有一些遊戲式的互動嗎？

答 對，在9月的韓國光州三年展裡，我會展出2001年的一件作品《恐龍蛋》，一些有趣的比例顛倒。侯瀚如10月在米蘭策劃的展覽中，我的作品是2004年在利物浦雙年展展出的《跳床 12345》：我在五個充氣跳床上，縫了紐約、巴

黎、倫敦、舊金山和利物浦等五個城市裡的中國城地圖，想法是讓大人孩子都能在上面玩。作品《恐龍蛋》的展場地上會擺一張白色和巧克力色的世界地圖（矽膠製），中國是巧克力顏色，其他的國家則是白色的。我在想如何能夠忽略這個受到矚目的龐大國家？另外，現在當我回中國的時候，我覺得自己像是遊客一樣，甚至是我說話的方式……最近有人請我寫一個描述遷移的小句子：「移民是逃離一個空間，還是去佔有另一個空間……我說的總是我離開前的那個年代的母語，它變了，我卻停留著。只有藝術幫助我跨過時間和空間的門檻。」當你一個國家待了很長一段時間以後，你不由得也會改變了，在回到自己國家的時候，你會覺得自己好像一個外人，這個改變很大。

問 在你的作品當中，常常會見到日常生活周遭的樣貌與痕跡，這是否和你已不在你自己的國家生活有關係？在南嶺這個地方，去年在一個中國的農村裡，你和一些1950年代移居到裡的當地居民一起工作？

答 當時在政府的要求之下，有11個人被派去那裡伐樹，現在它已是個不小的村莊，以前這也是一個懲罰反動知識分子的地方，有許多人都在那裡受了不少折騰。後來森林都被砍伐殆盡，政府又改變政策，決定重新種植樹林，不過他們又把溪水切斷用來發電賺錢，這是一部相當典型的小歷史。至今為止所有的歷史都是由男性書寫，因此，這個計畫的構想是我和當地的婦女們一起重新呈現、回憶和書寫這一部邊緣的小歷史，它帶有女性的觀點。所有作品都在村裡展出，我也把所有的文件資料都留了一份副本給當地。

最近，我替「中國水墨畫雙年展」做了一件動畫錄像作品，仍舊是以日常生活為主軸，我拍了一部有關動物標本廠的錄像，動畫裡頭動物們互相對話，談的是生命和藝術的故事。ART

11 ZEITUNG VUM
LËTZEBUGER VOLLEK

KULTUR

DËNSCHDEG, DE 5. JULI 2005

Shen Yuan: La Route Paris - Luxembourg

Née en 1959 à Xianyou, dans la province chinoise de Fujian, l'artiste vit depuis 1990 à Paris, où elle s'épanouit dans l'«installation art»⁽¹⁾, un genre qui peut pa-

Giulio-Enrico Pisani

raître - peut-être à tort - comme étant en rupture complète avec l'art «traditionnel» chinois. Shen Yuan n'a certes pas choisi le chemin le plus aisé pour exprimer sa sensibilité, à fleur

de peau. Elle me parut pourtant, lorsque je la rencontrai à la galerie Beaumontpublic,⁽²⁾ parfaitement en harmonie avec, justement, ce chemin. Qu'a-t-elle fait de ses racines? Elle ne les a pas perdues, loin de là. Poursuivez donc jusqu'au mot de la fin!

Elle a déjà tenu des expositions individuelles à l'Institut de France, au Centre d'Art de Berne, au Centre d'Art Contemporain de Kyushu au Japon et a participé à la biennale Sao Paulo. Ses nombreuses errances professionnelles lui ont déjà fait traverser l'Europe, l'Asie, les Amériques et l'Asie, mais «La Route Paris-Luxembourg» est sa première exposition individuelle chez nous.

Étonnant pour cette migratrice, qu'un saut de puce comme Paris - Luxembourg l'ait impressionnée au point de lui faire créer le clou de cette exposition! «La Route Paris-Luxembourg», réalisée en Chine, construite en polyester, représente sa propre voiture Opel, sans pneus, les portes détachées, la carrosserie pleine de fermetures éclair à des endroits inimaginables, comme un grand sac...

En fait, elle a été inspirée par son passage de la frontière franco-luxembourgeoise, où elle se fait contrôler chaque fois très méticuleusement, voire péniblement, par les douaniers,

qui semblent penser que chinois = contrebande. L'œuvre, exposée dans la grande salle de la galerie Beaumontpublic, est entourée d'objets pouvant en cacher d'autres. Enfin, installation art ci ou installation art là, à moi, cette bagnole me rappelle le pop art, dont elle serait une sorte de développement; et à vous?

Une autre création, aussi étrange que dérangement, «Perdre sa salive» a été créée à Paris en 1994⁽³⁾. Aujourd'hui, c'est la version 2005. Shen Yuan s'inspire d'elle-même, crée de nouveaux avatars, mais ne se répète pas. Des langues de glace, roses, hyper-réalistes, jaillissant du mur et enfilées sur de grands couteaux de cuisine, fondent dans un goutte à goutte de «salive» surréaliste tombant dans des pots métalliques. Quand les langues, pointées, assassines. Ça, c'est la galeriste qui me l'a expliqué, car, inutile de vous dire que je n'ai pas attendu que fondent entièrement ces extravagants appendices glacés, pour voir ce qu'ils cachaient. J'ai aperçu par contre un de ces redoutables couteaux, le manche fiché dans le mur, sa lame attendant de recevoir «sa» langue, qu'il faut bien entendu renouveler une fois fondue.

Une autre création - ma préférée en fait - s'inspire de la



«Grande Muraille qui suit les racines 2005», Sous les ponts, le long de la rivière II.

Grande muraille de Chine, et ses formes peuvent être aussi multiples que la muraille a de tours. L'invitation au vernissage de Shen Yuan de la galerie Beaumontpublic n'annonçant évidemment pas le détail des œuvres, quel ne fut mon étonnement lorsque dans le prospectus d'une exposition collective, organisée par le Forum d'Art contemporain dans la vallée de la Petrusse,⁽⁴⁾ je lus également le nom de Shen Yuan! Fort intrigué, et, le vernissage à la galerie Beaumontpublic n'étant pas imminent, je me précipitai d'abord au Forum d'Art contemporain, pour descendre ensuite dans la vallée de la Petrusse, où m'attendait... Shen Yuan? Non, mais bien sa «Grande Muraille qui suit les racines 2005»⁽⁵⁾.

Quinze jours plus tard, chez

Beaumontpublic, à droite près de l'entrée, je découvre une (autre) «Grande Muraille 2005 sur Racine en bois» qui s'accroche, se noue et s'élève le long d'une racine, véritable objet d'art tiré de la nature native de l'artiste et venue comme elle en droite ligne de la lointaine Chine. Nous voilà effectivement bien loin de la cousine petrussienne qui est, elle, bien enracinée chez nous. Problèmes avec la douane? Shen Yuan aurait-elle fait passer sa racine à travers la frontière dans son Opel à caches et at-trapes de «La Route Paris-Luxembourg»?

Voilà pour ce qui est des œuvres majeures. Mais il reste deux bijoux, qui sont exposés très discrètement dans la première pièce derrière la réception et vis-à-vis de la bibliothèque. Il s'agit de deux dessins + aquarelles sur papier de Chine d'une finesse et d'une poésie incomparables et s'approchant davantage de mes canons - certes un peu désuets - de la beauté, que les réalisations plus dérangement, mais plus mobiles, vivantes et renouvelables de l'«installation art». Étrange installation pourtant, que celle de la galerie, mais certes non casuelle, qui attire le regard du visiteur d'emblée sur ce qui caractérise le moins l'œuvre de Shen Yuan au quotidien: ses racines!

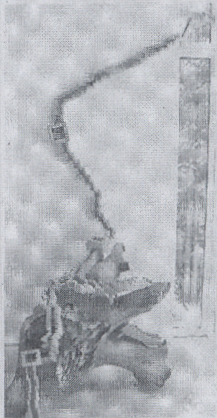
1) Installation art: art pluridisciplinaire usant de tous matériaux, moyens ou média pour créer une expérience viscérale et/ou conceptuelle dans un environnement particulier. L'artiste y emploie souvent directement l'espace du milieu d'exposition en général et de la galerie en particulier. Expression remontant peut-être à Marcel Duchamp et à l'art conceptuel des années 60. (extr. & trad. de Wikipedia)

2) Galerie Beaumontpublic + Königblock, 21A ave. Gaston Diderich, Lux. ville; ouvert mercredi à samedi de 12 à 18 h; Shen Yuan expose jusqu'au 15 octobre.

3) Sur //www.iniva.org/archiv/person/29 vous trouverez une vue de la 1ère version de cette œuvre et d'autres photos de précédentes expositions.

4) «Sous les ponts, le long de la rivière II» expo en plein air intégrée dans le parc de la Petrusse, du pont Adolphe au Pfaffenthal, visible jusqu'au 9 octobre; dans son ensemble un assez bel exemple d'«installation art».

5) L'«arbre-muraille» de Shen Yuan est le N° 1 du parcours. Descendre le chemin piétonnier partant du bvd. Marie-Thérèse quelques mètres à droite avant le pont Adolphe, passer sous le pont. L'arbre est un peu plus loin à votre droite. Le mieux est quand même de demander le plan du parcours au Casino de Luxembourg, Forum d'art contemporain, 41 rue Notre Dame. Visites guidées à vélo gratuites les samedis à 15 h.



«Grande Muraille 2005 sur Racine en bois» à la Galerie Beaumontpublic

Art contemporain

Les tribulations d'une Chinoise à Luxembourg

Romina Calò

AVEC LA ROUTE PARIS-LUXEMBOURG à la galerie beaumontpublic, l'artiste chinoise Shen Yuan a conçu, comme à son habitude, une œuvre sur mesure pour le lieu où elle expose. Adapter son travail de création à la culture et aux traditions de là où elle le présente est l'une des constantes de l'œuvre de cette artiste sensibilisée par son expérience de l'immigration aux questions de relations entre les différentes cultures.

Or, du Luxembourg, cette artiste de 46 ans qui vit à Paris semble avoir retenu deux impressions principales, si l'on s'en tient aux deux expositions luxembourgeoises auxquelles elle participe simultanément cette année : Son passé de forteresse, tout d'abord, auquel elle fait allusion en reconstituant une muraille de Chine en lego (*The Great Wall which follows the roots*) dans la nou-

velle édition de la balade artistique *Sous les Ponts la Rivière II* (jusqu'au 9 octobre), ainsi qu'à la galerie beaumontpublic. Et sa réputation de place forte financière que l'artiste a dû « subir » à plusieurs reprises.

Ostensiblement Chinoise, donc a priori forcément mafieuse, elle ne pouvait effectuer le trajet de retour entre le Grand-Duché et ses pénates parisiennes sans que son véhicule ne fasse l'objet de fouilles minutieuses par des douaniers zélés pour qui le délit de faciès est un devoir quotidien. Shen Yuan s'est ainsi amusée à décliner son expérience personnelle en deux variations a contrario sur le même thème. Une vidéo nous relate ainsi sa tentative de rendre sa voiture étanche – et donc insoupçonnable – en la recouvrant d'une membrane de latex, alors qu'une maquette grandeur nature de sa voi-

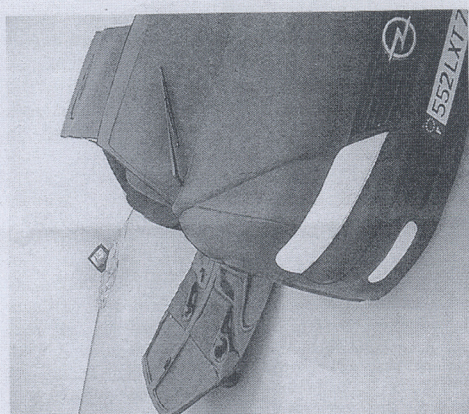
**Luxembourg
forteresse et place
financière : voilà les
deux impressions
que Shen Yuan
semble avoir
retenues**

ture, criblée de caches par l'artiste pour l'occasion, en fait au contraire le véhicule de contrebande idéal.

En 2003, Shen Yuan avait déjà tâté du sol luxembourgeois en partageant l'affiche à la galerie beaumontpublic avec Su-Mei Tse (Lion d'Or de Venise pour le pavillon luxembourgeois la même année). Cette fois-ci l'exposition lui est entièrement consacrée, et outre *La Route Paris-Luxembourg*, et *La grande Muraille qui suit les racines* déjà mentionnés, la galerie a insisté pour présenter un troisième pan du travail très fourni de l'artiste, particulièrement obsédant qui date de 1994.

Véritable œuvre organique, *Perdre sa salive* est constituée de sept grosses langues rosées et congelées qui fondent goutte à goutte dans des crachoirs judicieusement positionnés dessous. Symbolisant la vanité du langage lorsqu'il est abusivement employé (la « langue » laisse place à un couteau acéré lorsqu'elle fond totalement), l'œuvre insiste aussi sur le pouvoir que représente le langage, insoupçonné lorsqu'il s'agit d'une langue maternelle, crucial lorsque, immigré, on s'installe dans un pays à la langue et à la culture tout neufs.

Langue acérée, langue qui disparaît, histoire de langues...



La voiture camouflée de l'artiste

SHEN YUAN

JUST LIKE A FISH IN WATER

SHEN YUAN IS RARE among contemporary artists: she revels in kitsch and play and is fond of grand gestures, but she has the lightest, most subtly profound of touches. Her installations are extraordinary, yet relate directly to everyday life. She has said that she wishes to 'reveal the latent language of the material, to breathe life into inanimate things, make useless things useful and make useful things useless'.¹ Her adroit works speak in many registers, many tongues: some shout, others whisper. Their immediate ingenuity makes viewers wonder, gasp or even laugh out loud, but beyond the special effects lies a babble of linguistic, historical and personal references.

A common thread of investigation within Shen Yuan's work is the nature of migration, memory and language – what lies behind remembered sounds, sayings, smells and sensations. She became known internationally during the 1990s, a decade when other young Chinese artists began making headlines for aggressive performances and installations involving, for example, rotting meat and copulating pigs. While dramatic, her quieter works offer a pause, a moment of reflection and reprieve.





the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA).² At Arnolfini, Bristol, there was a major show which featured two new large-scale installations, created in France, China and the United Kingdom in 2000, as well as several key works from the 1990s. Simultaneously, Chisenhale Gallery in London exhibited *Un Matin du Monde*, 2000, an installation which recreates an entire rooftop of a traditional Chinese house and reflects on the migrant's experience of carrying the baggage of memory.

An education project, 'Tongue-tied', ran alongside the exhibition at Arnolfini. Curated by Michael Prior, the six-month project involved local writer Alyson Sarah Hallett working with various groups of children and young people in Bristol, writing short poems in response to Shen Yuan's work. A selection of these poems, some of which are included here, was then sent out by text message to subscribers' mobile phones, one each day, for two weeks. Subscribers were recruited via flyers at the gallery, and the anonymous poems were intended as a reminder of the exhibition and an extension of Shen Yuan's work and ideas:

WHEN YOU GO / SOME PLACE ELSE / YOU CAN FIND THAT /
YOUR TONGUE FREEZES / YOU CAN'T FIT IN / SO YOU GO /
SOME PLACE ELSE / TO BE HAPPY.

The messages often took on a significance of their own for the receiver, far removed from the exhibition. 'Tongue-tied' demonstrates how Shen Yuan's work speaks directly to viewers about their own experiences. The words illustrate the interpretative nature of language, and the possibilities offered by twists and turns of phrase, even within a brief text message. Shen Yuan has stated that the role of the artist is to 'endow objects with a message'. If her desire is to give inanimate, material things tongues of their own, it is to endow them with the ability to communicate as readily, as variably, as the spoken or written word. Yet, typical of her work, this desire also exposes the exclusive, limited nature of language: perhaps it is visual images which invest words with their meanings.

Shen Yuan was born in Xian You, Fujian Province, China, in 1959. She belonged to the first generation of students to be enrolled after the Cultural Revolution at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, from which she graduated in 1982. Her work was included in the 'China/Avant-Garde' exhibition at China National Art Gallery in Beijing in 1989. The following year she moved with her husband – the celebrated artist Huang Yong Ping – to Paris, in part to have greater freedom to pursue her work. She was represented in group exhibitions in Europe during the early 1990s, but made a wider breakthrough in 1997 when she participated in the international touring survey 'Cities on the Move', as well as 'Uncertain Pleasure' at Art Beatus Gallery, Vancouver, and 'Parisien(ne)s', an inIVA exhibition at Camden Arts Centre in London.

above left and left: SHEN YUAN, *Un Matin du Monde*, 2000 (details), installation, tiles, wood, mixed media, dimensions variable; opposite: SHEN YUAN, *Feel Just Like a Fish in Water*, 2000, work in progress, Bristol blue glass and sea salt.

space. Filling several large windows at Camden Arts Centre with huge 'heads' of hair (made from flax), Shen Yuan then plaited the tresses which flowed onto the gallery floor and joined the plaits into larger chains of hair. At Art Beatus, she created a similar piece where the hair 'grew' from the backs of sofas. As the artist explained:

My interest has always focused on the transition of image. This is also the starting point of my work. Sofas are traditionally stuffed with hemp fibres. I imagine opening the sofas' backs and drawing out the hemp fibres. Then I will weave the fibres together in order to transform the appearance of the sofas. Also, there is an idiom in Chinese which says 'San Wu Chen Qun – In threes or fours or in knots'. I use the number three as a metaphor for a community. Three braids interwoven symbolise lives bound up together.

Yellow Seat, 2001, a piece in the Arnolfini exhibition which continued this theme, was a Louis XV chair which looked normal from the front, but the back of which was replaced with plaited locks of blond 'hair'. Shen Yuan's watercolour and pencil working drawing of the piece is beautiful, simple and touching in its detail. She has commented that the plaited hair is symbolic of women as the source of life. Perhaps, given the importance to her of her family – a unit of three – the work expresses an inescapable but joyful binding together. However, while it is difficult to qualify exactly why, the actual doctored sofa generates a sense of unease. This has more to do with the transformation of a domestic 'known' into something unruly, rather than the magnification in scale of an ordinary object – a device used most recently (and perhaps to minimal effect) by

installations which explore domestic tensions.

One of the most affecting works in the exhibition was actually on the smallest scale. *Untitled*, 1995, is a Chinese slipper lined on the inside with a layer of the artist's nail clippings. The exterior of the beautiful golden slipper contrasts with the discarded product of the human body on its interior. This small work also illustrates the filmic nature of Shen Yuan's work: her ability to convey the drip-drip of time, even in a static object. The slipper and nail clippings have little histories of their own, narratives told over time. As Gilane Tawadros describes it: 'Shen Yuan's works approximate a condition of "becoming" rather than "being"'.³

Perdre sa Salive (Wasting One's Spit), 1994, more obviously illustrates the passing of time. A particularly complex work, it was created for Shen Yuan's first solo exhibition in Paris in 1994 and reproduced in the Arnolfini exhibition. *Perdre sa Salive* consists of a number of large, blood-red ice tongues, attached to pillars in the gallery, which gradually melt, dripping their 'saliva' into metal spittoons. Drip by drip they diminish to reveal, over the course of the exhibition, sharp kitchen knives at their centre. As Shen Yuan notes, 'an image of unassumingness is transformed into an image of menace – the knife'. By giving the tongue an active, complex role, the work highlights the violence that can be meted out by the tongue rather than the fist.

It is important that Shen Yuan sees the 'unassumingness' of the tongue as a mere image. As Martina Köppel-Yang has noted, for Shen Yuan: 'As the word "tongue" connotes the notion of language, the melting of the ice



A COMMON THREAD OF
 INVESTIGATION WITHIN
 SHEN YUAN'S WORK IS
 THE NATURE OF
 MIGRATION, MEMORY AND
 LANGUAGE – WHAT LIES
 BEHIND REMEMBERED
 SOUNDS, SAYINGS, SMELLS
 AND SENSATIONS.

SHEN YUAN, *Diverged Tongue*, 1999, installation,
 fabric and plastic, 1200 x 150 x 300 cm.

tongue, which expresses the excessive wasting of one's words, signifies the loss of language.⁴ Shen Yuan has commented on the tongue's associations with both language and taste – its 'spirituality and materiality'.

YOUR TONGUE IS A DIVING BOARD FOR WORDS / YOUR
 TONGUE IS A BRIDGE FOR FOOD TO WALK ACROSS /
 YOUR TEETH ARE STEPPING STONES / YOUR TEETH ARE
 THE EXECUTIONER'S AXE.

Perdre sa Salive is part of the artist's ongoing exploration of her experience of leaving China and losing the ability to communicate with the subtlety, diversity and power which we are afforded by our 'mother tongue'. As Tawadros notes, the work goes deeper than this: it reflects on the relationship between the visual and the linguistic. It 'points to the limits of language to describe and translate lived experience in a new global economy'.⁵

WET TONGUES GROWING DRY / UNDER THE HEAT OF
 THE SUN / OUT OF A MOUTH / DISSOLVING SLOWLY /
 TRYING TO TALK / BUT NOT SUCCEEDING.

First realised for Shen Yuan's solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle in Bern in 2000, *Un Matin du Monde* replicates the rooftop of a Chinese house common to the Fujian Province where Shen Yuan grew up. Typically, the artist has built an entire sensory environment: a cloth drying on bamboo sticks blows in the 'breeze'; a homemade television aerial sticks up from the tiles; a drying duck casts a shadow on the wall; a soundtrack of birds, chickens, barking dogs and chattering humans murmurs over the buzz of gallery white noise. Each roof tile is balanced, hanging like one of a thousand remembered sensations. It is an odd feeling to be able to peer in and down at this 'sample' of Chinese life like a tourist or anthropologist climbing on a roof. *Un Matin du Monde* could be seen as a nostalgia trip which attempts to re-create the lost world of the émigré's forsaken past. It is a wistful work, one which brings alive memories and imparts sensations which are no longer simply lived, unspoken. But these memories are acute, part of a non-linear, ever-shifting personal identity.

STRANGE! / JUST SAY IT, CAN YOU HEAR ME? / TALKING ... /
 WITHOUT ANY WORDS.

Shen Yuan has also taken her exploration of the experience of globalisation beyond the personal to a grander scale. Two new works created for the Arnolfini exhibition are ambitious and large in both scale and imagination. *Feel Just Like a Fish in Water*, 2000, was created during her residency in Bristol. The translated title relates to a Chinese phrase meaning 'perfectly at home', but, like the English title, this is a topsy-turvy

Yves Klein-type blue. The contrasting colours and textures of salt, glass, water and wood make this a visually brilliant work.

Feel Just Like a Fish in Water reflects on the migration of people and things, so central to Bristol's trading past, and plays on the contrast between the living and the dead: the fish trapped, alive, inside a boat, the others cast, assigned to the world of inactive objects. (In a further twist, the day I visited Arnolfini, the fish inside the boat had died, and a large inflatable sculpture, *Diverged Tongue*, 1999, had broken down and been replaced by photographs inadequately describing the work.)

Shen Yuan's other new work, *The Dinosaur's Egg*, 2000, appeared to be groundbreaking on paper but was not as successful in reality. A massive, broken 'chocolate' egg lies open at the centre, 'spilling' a molten chocolate map of China. Beyond China, other countries are outlined on the floor, covering the whole of Arnolfini's downstairs gallery. From the egg, about fifty figures, each about half a metre in height, march outward as though, in Hou Hanru and Evelyne Jouanno's words, 'they are immigrants about to flood the whole globe'.⁶ Derived from the toys contained in Kinder Surprise eggs, the characters all appear to be doing stereotypically Chinese activities – making fireworks, pulling rickshaws, throwing Kung Fu moves. They are bizarre, grotesque even, with exaggerated grins and comic-strip buck teeth, pulled and slicked-back hair, many of them holding masks over their faces.

Shen Yuan has previously shown brand-awareness in her work – specifying, for example, that Grolsch beer bottles be used in *Demolishing the Bridge after Crossing the River*, 1997. *Alley Battle*, 1997, included in 'Cities on the Move', relates overtly to political struggle. *The Dinosaur's Egg* relates directly to the relationship between big business and global trade, between consumer desires and cheap labour, and the push-pull treatment of economic migrants. These issues, often described under the umbrella term of 'globalisation', are the most widely pertinent of our time.

The Dinosaur's Egg is stunning and unsettling but does not have the organic subtlety of much of Shen Yuan's other work. It raises more in interpretation, in words, than it does visually. However, this reservation is perhaps due to the standards of complexity set by her previous work. It is rare to find an artist who speaks so eloquently through the visual, and whose work is deeply personal yet addresses the pervasive nature of the global economy.

1 Shen Yuan, quoted in *Shen Yuan*, Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA), London, and Arnolfini, Bristol, 2001.

2 'Shen Yuan', Arnolfini, Bristol, 21 July – 9 September 2001; Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool, 14 December 2001 – 2 February 2002. 'Shen Yuan: Un Matin du Monde', Chisenhale Gallery, London, 25 July – 9 September 2001.

3 Gilane Tawadros, 'The leftovers of translation: The works of Shen Yuan', in *Shen Yuan*, op. cit., p. 34.

4 Martina Köppel-Yang, 'From *Waterbed* to *Diverged Tongue* and *Un Matin du Monde*: A short chronology of the transformation of images', in *Shen Yuan*, op. cit., p. 22.

5 Tawadros, op. cit., p. 33.

6 Hou Hanru and Evelyne Jouanno, 'Material performance', in *Shen Yuan*, op. cit., p. 56.

A woman's fight for survival in a cultural purge

SHEN Yuan's art is as unsettling as her life has been unsettled.

Suffocated by the climate of cultural repression which followed the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, Shen was forced to leave China and arrived in Paris with no friends and unable to speak more than a few words of French.

Much of her work is an attempt to capture this feeling of alienation and isolation which frequently results in a disturbing clash of the homely and familiar with the frightening and unexpected.

Her one-woman show at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol's harbourside includes the striking *Wasting One's Spittle*, which consists of four huge pink-coloured tongues made of ice which gradually melt, dripping into metal spittoons, to reveal four sharp kitchen knives.

The soft fleshy tongues are transformed into the menacing knives, which themselves are removed from their safe domestic environment.

"The word for tongue also means language in many languages and the work can also signify an inability to communicate," explains Shen.

For Shen the work is a distillation of the mundane and the comfortable of everyday life with the equally everyday dirt and grime and growth of the body. Shen left China in 1990, a

year after the authorities brutally crushed the fledgling student democracy movement in Tiananmen Square, along with her husband Fuzhou Xiamen, also an artist.

Her mother and father were both illustrators and along with her husband she had studied at the traditional Zhe Jiang academy of art.

But as they both began to experiment with Western artistic ideas, they found themselves under scrutiny from communist China's anti-Western authorities.

"The atmosphere at the time was very restrictive," recalls Shen. "After what happened in Tiananmen Square there was a real crackdown against all Western influences. It

was difficult for artists to travel and the attitudes were very closed."

In what is her first major solo exhibition in Britain, Bristol and its maritime history became the inspiration for the piece *Feel Just Like a Fish in Water*.

Shen created fish from Bristol blue glass flung over a sea made of salt. In the middle 'floats' an old rowing boat and at the bottom of the boat is a small pool of water which is home to four or five live fish.

"The boat is about survival," says Shen. "The sea has turned dry, the fish have only a little bit of water but they are able to survive."

The downstairs room of the Arnolfini gallery is reserved for the specially-commissioned work *The*

Dinosaur's Egg. This piece was inspired by the toys in the Kinder Surprise eggs she bought for her young daughter.

The plastic figures resemble cartoon beavers in traditional Chinese dress; some are carrying rickshaws, others practising martial arts, another eats a bowl of rice with chopsticks.

Shen Yuan's work will be on display at Arnolfini on Bristol's Narrow Quay until September 9.

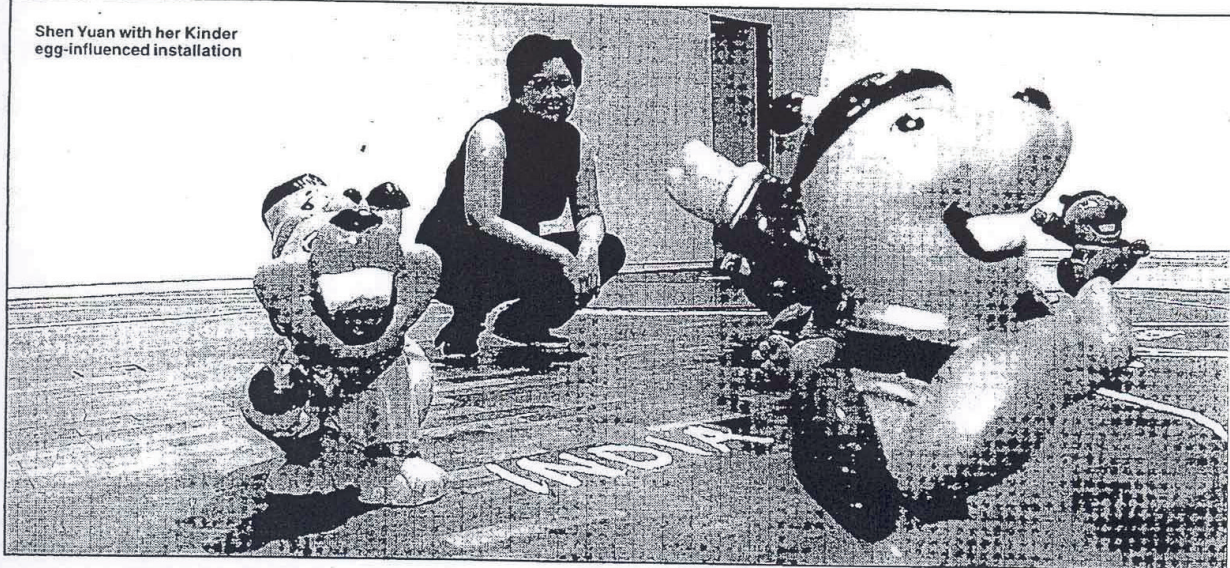
Paintings, drawings and objects from her work in progress can be seen at Station on Phoenix Wharf, a short walk from Arnolfini.



Flight to freedom: Artist Shen Yuan

Unwrapping some surprising exhibits

Shen Yuan with her Kinder egg-influenced installation



DON'T normally find myself interviewing a Bristol-based artist with the aid of a translator.

We all know the accent can get a bit thick at times – but this is still rather out of the ordinary. But so is Shen Yuan – Arnolfini's current exhibitor.

Yuan left China in the the 1980s with many other progressive artists of the time and moved to Paris, where she still lives. The effects of migration – the problems of communicating in a different language or within an alien culture – can clearly be seen in Yuan's art, much of which uses the visual imagery of tongues – or in translation – language.

And Yuan, despite the language barrier, loves to play with semantics along these lines. She came over to England last summer at the invitation of Arnolfini for her first UK solo exhibition and began work on her new installations currently showing at the gallery.

One of these, *Feel Just Like A Fish In Water*, uses Bristol Blue Glass and the city's maritime connections as prominent sources of inspiration and materials.

The title is also a clever play on words – confusing the English feeling of being a fish out of water and the Chinese proverb that mirrors the title, which means the very opposite.

Filling an entire studio space with a ton of salt, a boat, live fish, and glass fish, the piece must be observed from a viewing platform at the side of the room.

And standing on the edge of the salt desert, with water lapping soothingly against the wooden sides of the boat there is an incredible feeling of calm and tranquillity that floods from the piece.

But that is the only calm and tranquillity you'll find in the rest of Shen Yuan's exhibition. Yuan takes much of her inspiration from toys, believing that although they are made for children, they are also very important for adults.

Hence her major piece, filling the downstairs

exhibition space uses 30 knee-high reproductions of the orange plastic beaver toys enclosed in Kinder eggs.

Carrying chopsticks or working implements, Yuan has used them to represent the work ethic the Chinese are famed for.

But all the characters are running out of China and spreading across the world in the same way Yuan and many other Chinese artists have left their home country.

And continuing with the theme of childhood is Yuan's piece, *Wasting One's Spittle* – four fleshy tongues made from ice – but instead of having ice lolly sticks inside, they are left to drip away to reveal sinister sharpened knives.

It is this edge of menace on many of Yuan's pieces that make them so interesting. And although she may have had to communicate her words through an interpreter to me, her artwork speaks for itself.



The one that got away



Charles
Darwent

Shen Yuan
Arnolfini Gallery
BRISTOL

Chisenhale Gallery
LONDON

Comparisons are odious, which is the best reason I can think of for making them. Stand in front of Shen Yuan's installation, *Un Matin du Monde*, at London's Chisenhale Gallery and you find yourself comparing it with Tracey Emin's Margate beach-hut, *The last thing I said to you was don't leave me here*, on show at Tate Liverpool.

Similarities between the two are circumstantial but significant. Emin's hut is an actual piece of her childhood, transposed by force of will into an art gallery and so into an artwork. Yuan's has undergone a similar transformation, but at a longer distance. Her white-walled, clay-tiled installation is based on traditional village housing in Southern China, which the artist fled for Paris in 1990. As with tales of churches carried off by angels or palaces by djinns, the miraculousness of both works lies in the story of their transportation. They are process pieces, their removal telling us

that their makers have come a long way.

And there similarities between the two end. The power of Emin's work lies in the fact that, while it may have been moved geographically, it has been left where it was objectively. *The last thing* etc. was once a real beach-hut in Margate; now it is a real beach-hut on Merseyside. Its point is its egotism. If Emin says that her hut is art, then it's art: the mere fact of it being a relic of her childhood is enough to endow it with artful powers. By contrast, Yuan's house never really existed as a house. It is a composite, mined from her memory.

The difference is telling. Where Emin could, if she wished, still work as an artist in Margate, Yuan, as an avant-gardiste, could not do so in Fujian. Remembering is all she can do. While her recreated house - complete with wind-drying ducks and a soundtrack of inhabitants chatting and chickens clucking - sounds kitsch, its point is its inventedness. Yuan's house is variously impossible. Its Chinese-puzzle walls lock you out; it emerges, half-buried, from the Chisenhale's floor, so that you're left looking down on its roof like a melancholic Dick Van Dyke. For all its passing references to contemporary Western art - conceptual installations, white cubes, plinths - it inhabits a space whose rules are not your own. More poignantly, it inhabits a space that doesn't belong to Yuan, either. It's utopian, in the sense both of being a kind of nostalgic haven and of being unachievable; a non-place.

This makes *Un Matin du Monde* sound parochial, as though it's just about China or the experience of exile. To some extent, that's true. Yuan's house, like her new installation at the Arnolfini in Bristol - *The Dinosaur's Egg* - is certainly topical. The television aerial of the first is

decorated with tins of an Italian soft-drink called Chinò, suggesting both the unstoppable onslaught of a Western pop culture and the commensurate cheapening of a Chinese one. The slitty-eyed Disney animals scampering out of China across the Arnolfini's mapped floor in *The Dinosaur's Egg* hint at the way Westerners see Chinese diasporas - Yuan, presumably, included; which is as biddable eager-beavers, prone to doing cute ethnic things. (The work's political incorrectness is not all one-way. Its map of the world notably excludes both Taiwan and Tibet.)

But Yuan, at her best, is about a great deal more than current affairs. Her work isn't trying to be bilingual but omnilingual, finding some kind of universal experience in repression and exile. Her *Perdre de sa Salive* - ice-lolly tongues, impaled to the gallery walls on kitchen knives and melting into spittoons - can be read as being specifically about free speech, or more broadly as a kind of Bunuel-ish *grand guignol* of the senses. They are extraordinarily dense pieces, both lickers and lickable - made, according to their labels, of "water, wine, orange squash, cola" - both organs of taste and tasty. Her *Feel Just Like Fish in Water* needs no biographical inside knowledge to move you. A small boat marooned on a sea of salt, it taps memories so ancient as to be part of the psychic genome: the revulsion and deliciousness of taste, the terror and beauty of loss.

c.darwent@independent.co.uk

Shen Yuan: Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol (0117 929 9191), *Un Matin du Monde*, Chisenhale Gallery, E3 (020 8981 4518); both to 9 September

film and video works which speak to the theme of 'Trauma' most compellingly. This is in part because of the wider relationship that lens-based media has with trauma and from which audiences will inevitably draw. Yet familiarity with such narratives and how they are constructed through the camera and the screen, presents the show with a tightrope not entirely of its own making. On the one side there is the danger of viewers being overprovided for by certain works whilst, on the other, are pieces that appear deceptively mute. The works that sit on the tightrope perfectly, such as Doherty's *Tell me what you want*, 1996, are where shadowy identities, awkward silences and subtle repetitions provoke the viewer to reflect on the legacies of those marks made by trauma. ■

Trauma tours to Firstsite @ the Minorities Art Gallery, Colchester September 15 to November 17 and MoMA, Oxford January 25 to April 7.

Nicky Bird is an artist based in Scotland and lectures on Contemporary Photographic Practice at the University of Northumbria at Newcastle.

■ Shen Yuan

Arnolfini Bristol July 21 to September 9

Chisenhale Gallery London July 25 to September 9

Shen Yuan is one of the first generation of artists to study fine art in China after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Graduating from The Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in 1982, she was part of a Chinese Avant Garde well acquainted with western contemporary art and its philosophical underpinnings. In 1990 Yuan, with her husband the artist Huang Yong Ping, relocated to Paris in a move that prompted her reflection: how does one start one's life again, aged 31? The central role her practice plays in that process is apparent in both these shows, as is the way in which she uses her art as a means of translation and mediation between different cultural experiences in order to arrive at some kind of common understanding.

In *The Dinosaur's Egg*, 2001, an exuberant horde of brightly painted Chinese figures, about two feet tall, stream across a map of Asia and beyond outlined on the floor of the downstairs gallery at Arnolfini. Their apparent origin is a large chocolate egg, split in half that rests on a pool of chocolate taking the shape of China. The figures are scaled up versions of Kinder surprises, the toys found inside chocolate Kinder eggs. They represent the Chinese as eager beavers with slanted eyes and buck-teeth, coolie hats and pigtailed. Ever smiling and cheerful, the figures enact stereotypical occupations such as pulling rickshaws, making fireworks, carrying burdens and, of course, doing Kung Fu. The fact that the German-produced Kinder eggs promoting such stereotypes are marketed to children highlights yet another negative

aspect of multinational corporate power. Yuan however pushes the stereotype further by arranging the cartoon-like characters fanning out across a map. She proposes them as a threat – a modern day yellow peril – the hard-working but different Chinese who are currently trying to sneak into Europe and America.

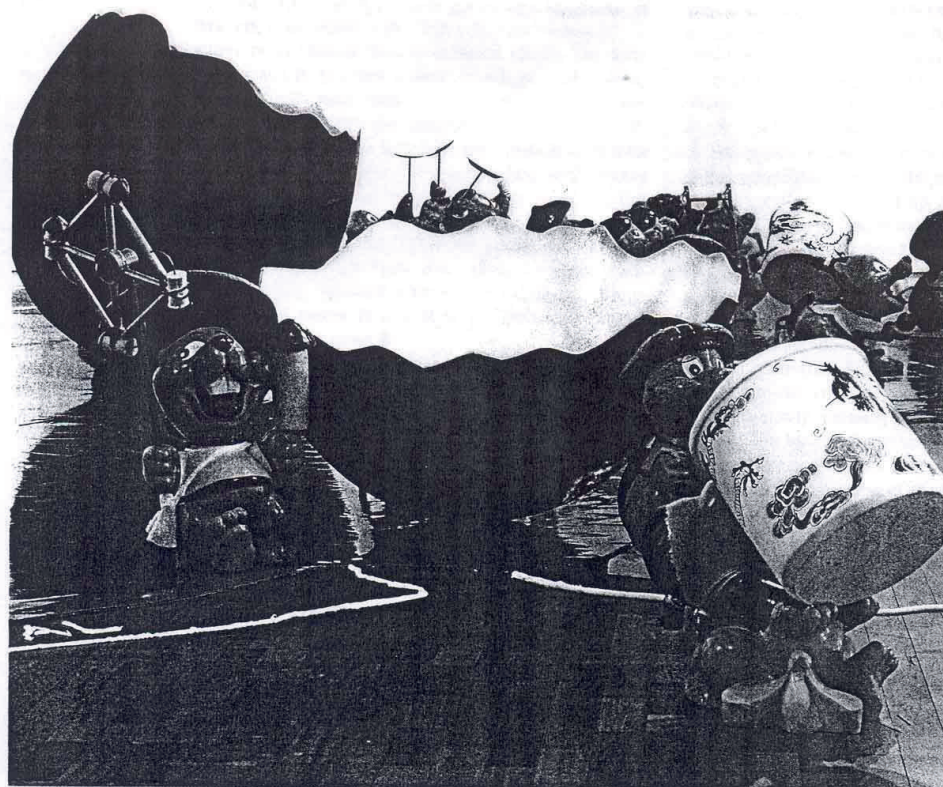
Using toys to produce work that is multivalent and globally sophisticated is a typical Yuan strategy. In an upstairs gallery, a scaled-up version of one of those annoying curled-up paper noisemakers suddenly unfurls across the space to reveal its forked end. *Diverged Tongue*, 1998/2001, alludes to the tongue as the site of spoken language which, as an artist separated from her mother tongue, is a recurring element in Yuan's vocabulary. *Perdre sa salive*, 2001, consists of four enormous tongues made from flesh coloured ice mounted on each side of a square column. The ice melts noisily into metal spittoons slowly revealing the sharp kitchen knives that support the tongue sculptures. As the knives begin to appear a tension is set up: how long will the ice hold? But there is also a sense of the violence at the heart of language, what Jacques Derrida has identified as the exclusions inherent in binary systems. More prosaically, the icy tongues melt at different rates and, as I entered the upstairs gallery, one shot across the floor quickly forming a liquid stain as if refusing the tidiness of its designated spittoon. These sorts of unexpected transformations characterise Yuan's work. It is as if she sets up situations in order to find out how the materials will behave and the worse they behave the better.

In *Banquette Jaune*, 2001, the formal rectitude of a Louis XV love seat, covered in Chinese silk, is disturbed by the eruption of eight fat white plaits flowing from its back out across the gallery floor. Like the tongue pieces, this work also refuses containment and insists on exposing the unruly arbitrariness of the material world. In *Untitled*, 1995, a slipper sits on the upturned lid of the empty brown shoebox beside it. A grid, crudely fashioned from brass wire, fits the insole of the slipper exactly and on top of it is an extensive pile of nail clippings. The work is shockingly physical because slippers are so intimately connected with the body and especially with the foot at its most vulnerable and bare: private, off-guard. Nail clippings are bodily refuse – an abject measure of ourselves which reminds us of the passage of time and our own mortality (then, there are the stories about fingernails still growing on corpses). The tension between the fleshy (mortal) foot evoked and the scale-like primordial nail clippings gives the piece great power while at the same time leaving space for the viewer to make her/his own meanings. This kind of implied tension is also fundamental to *Like a Fish in Water*, 2001, a new installation made especially for the Arnolfini show.

Three wide steps lead up to a doorway that serves as a proscenium arch for an installation that can be viewed but not entered. The whitewashed space is filled with a sea of salt embedded in which is a small wooden boat that leans to one side in a state of dereliction. Its paint is

EXHIBITIONS

Shen Yuan
The Dinosaur's Egg
2001



peeling and parts of the hull are rotten, but in a pool of water collected in the bilge fish swim in hopeful circles. Objects made from Bristol Blue Glass are scattered on the dream-like expanse. Some are broken whilst others are whole, but among them, also cast in bright blue glass, is the skeleton of a fish that Yuan cooked for the artists she worked with during her residency in Bristol last August. Cooking the fish was a gift that supercedes language, as does her gesture of transforming the remnants of the meal to include them in her art.

As an installation, *Like a Fish in Water* oscillates between serene beauty and apocalyptic terror, both ostensible components of the sublime. Like most of Yuan's work, it deals with change, loss and transformation, themes she also addresses in an installation as

seemingly immutable as *Un Matin du Monde*, 2000, at the Chisenhale Gallery. An enormous grey tiled rooftop dominates the gallery space. Ducks, fish and spices hang drying in the wind whilst a soundtrack plays random voices and traffic noise. This description makes it sound literal but as there is neither house beneath nor sky above, I found myself caught up in the simple audacity of the metonym. There are enormous geographical and cultural gaps between China and Europe but the roof as a liminal space is familiar to most city dwellers. Like much of Yuan's extensive practice, both the exotic and the ordinary are transformed and reversed in order to bridge gaps, give gifts and speak the unspoken. ■

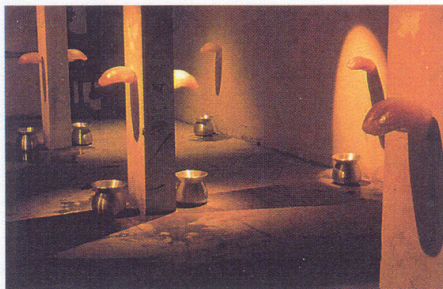
Valerie Reardon is a freelance writer.



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1. «Demolishing the bridge after the crossing of the river», 1997.

2. «Alley Battle», 1997.

3. «Perdre sa salive», 1994.

4. Portrait de Shen Yuan par Jérôme Schlomoff.

Allusive et métaphorique, l'œuvre de Shen Yuan interroge les liens qui unissent chaque individu à l'Autre, que ce soit à travers le langage ou le corps, l'évocation de la violence sociale ou de l'antagonisme entre les sexes. Texte Hélène Kelmachter/Portrait Jérôme Schlomoff.

Lorsqu'elle arrive à Paris en 1990, après avoir étudié, à Fujian, la peinture traditionnelle chinoise, Shen Yuan découvre, à travers une langue dont elle fait l'apprentissage, une façon nouvelle de voir le monde. Soulignant le symbolisme attaché au langage et sa dimension métaphorique, elle donne à voir avec «Perdre sa salive» (1994), le passage du temps, la disparition,

Hervé Chandès

présente **SHEN YUAN**

la transformation de la matière et de l'image : éphémères et transitoires, des langues de glace – évocatrices de la parole, mais aussi d'un organe privilégié par la médecine chinoise pour détecter les maux – surgies des murs de l'espace d'exposition, fondent peu à peu pour laisser apparaître, effilée et menaçante, la lame d'un couteau qu'elles renfermaient. Révélant l'énergie qui circule entre les choses, et l'espace qui les relie, l'artiste interroge ailleurs la place de l'individu face au groupe, réunissant trois sièges par de la filasse échappée de leur dossier («Trois fauteuils», 1995), ou tressant d'épais échaveaux suspendus dans l'embrasure d'une série de fenêtres («In three and four or in knot», 1997). Illustrations de proverbes chinois, ces œuvres déclinent la symbolique du cheveu dans la Chine ancienne : signe de soumission et de deuil quand ils sont dénoués, ils deviennent, attachés, l'expression

de la vie. Explorant la relation au corps à travers les images qui lui sont liées, Shen Yuan interroge la notion d'identité lorsqu'elle brode, avec minutie et précision, son empreinte digitale sur une tranche de jambon («Broderie», 1998). A la fois transition et rupture, le pont de bouteilles de verre qu'elle jette au-dessus d'un ruisseau, à Leerdam, aux Pays-Bas («Demolishing the bridge after the crossing of the river», 1997), apparaît comme la métaphore d'un passage, celui de l'Orient à l'Occident, ou simplement celui de la vie. Image d'une histoire en mouvement, d'un monde en évolution, de la succession des conflits et de la conquête de la liberté, «Alley Battle» (1997) invite le spectateur à intervenir, par l'utilisation de bicyclettes transformées en canons à œufs, sur des images filmées de manifestations. Personnelle et intimiste, à la fois sereine et violente, l'œuvre de Shen Yuan élabore un système dans lequel les objets fonctionnent comme les éléments d'un langage, redessinant les contours du monde. □

CdA PRATIQUE. Shen Yuan est née en 1959 à Xianyou, Chine. Elle vit à Paris depuis 1990. Elle a participé à l'exposition «Cities on the move», présentée à la Sécession de Vienne (1997), au Capc-musée de Bordeaux (1998) et à PS1 à New York (1998). Cette année, l'ont exposée la galerie Eric Dupont, à Paris (en février), et l'Asian Fine Arts Factory, à Berlin (en mars).