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A CHILDISH NOTHINGNESS

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Featuring the work of **Xue Mu**

Exhibition at

WEO WORKSHOP

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A Childish Nothingness

Seeking potential value in ignored matters, Xue Mu intends to visualize the hidden qualities of living circumstances that are generally labeled with economic, historical or social political references.

A Childish Nothingness entitles Mu's ongoing art practice since 2005, a working process to attempt to disregard the complex and mediated living circumstances. This results in a personal imaginary environment, openly distinct from external context, where objects, texts and images are intertwined.

Mu's premise is to disclose the ephemeral matters of life as well as the unspeakable, addressing this in non-acknowledged forms. She is in search of potential new forms of life, where life is seen as chemical substances as well as metaphysical concept.

^{*} Part of the original content were re-edited by Xue Mu Studio and their original authors.

The Artist Transforms

Jesse van Winden / November 2014

The artist imagines, the artist discovers, the artist composes. The artist reads, the artist listens, the artist speaks, the artist takes notes on the studio walls. The artist lives, the artist transforms.

And the beholder? He or she who views does more or less the same, but departs from the objects as transformed by the artist.

In a titillating conversation, the elaborate and intellectual Xue Mu told me that to her, one work is "the ticket" to the next. That is not to say they look or function alike however. It is as if working on one project evokes ideas, thoughts and problems that cause a necessity for another work, in order to deal with such impulses. Therefore, an enduring continuity can be traced in her work. Mu's artistic output has been said to contemplate contemporary notions of value. To which stations, ports or gateways have those proverbial tickets led her, then?

Black Diamond (2014) is a series that can be considered itineraries in themselves. The whirling and sweeping charcoal lines allude to Action Painting through their visual idiom, but can be more accurately understood as meditative processes that the artist performs while absorbing and reflecting intellectual stimuli. Be it world news, lectures by theorists, or her musical favourites of the day (think experimental electronic music from the last six decades, but also J.S. Bach, Leonard Cohen, and the Ramones). In that sense, the drawings are an interplay between the practiced and internalized intelligence of the body: determined but elegant tracings that require skilled and sensitive muscles, eyes, and nerves – and the realm of ratio. The implicit interest in corporeal idioms may be routed from Mu's Portrait series (2012-ongoing) that visualizes and psychologizes individual motion patterns. Furthermore, the charcoal stick is not the only tool of the artist in these works; the eraser forms both a literal a metaphorical means of expression. This is a wink to the historical timeframe of Abstract Expressionism, connotating Robert Rauschenberg's Erased De Kooning Drawing (1953). However, Mu restores the gesture of erasing as simultaneously graphic and philosophical: action-erasure-drawings.

Just as the Black Diamond series has a conceptual pendant in the Portraits, especially the dance-related works, Mu's A Childish Noth-

ingness series (2005-ongoing) represents a longstanding fascination with beautiful objects that are commonly perceived as worthless but transformed into works of art by the artist. This interest proves informative of Mu's practice throughout, taking different shapes. Typical waste products like cigarette butts or banana peels are conceived as ready-made objects of beauty. Or, of contemplation: in the context of the notoriously litter-prohibitive Singapore, these works obtain a political quality in that they stimulate reflection on the relation between art and offence. A_C_N 2014 Post-Playground, the marbles on the gallery floor embody a similar mechanism: they are beautiful small objects in their own right, but they are not usually perceived as such. Also, they activate the viewer, as they can be looked over, tripped over, but also kicked against (in the latter case, their traces may establish aesthetic echoes with the swaying flows of grayscales in the Black Diamond charcoal drawings).

The works from this series are executed in two distinct media: threedimensional objects whose small scale invites an intimate inspection, as well as large photographic prints in which similar objects are carefully eternalized from above with a technical camera. Their compositions are meticulously arranged, but often as a result of coincidence: a sudden stroke of wonder, serendipity, and epiphany. Even the composition of A_C_N_2014 Marble & Bananas should be considered the product of a vision in the artist's mind's eye that connects a Pop-Art inspired image and an interest in everyday objects to a political insight that foregrounds the subversive potential of the bananas' peels, as indicated above. If this work produces contemplation on the intersection of art and waste, its major thought may be that art lifts its objects and subjects to a dimension of its own, but does not leave the referred Platonic Forms and Ideas untouched: 'banana' becomes the object of a speculative chain of causes and reactions that engage notions of cultural universalities and differences, taste, and the Benjaminian aura, that 'banana' would otherwise never experience.

Something else is going on in this series. An image containing elements of structural rough comparable subject matter is installed in diametrically opposed formats: the photographic prints are spatially flat but loom high over the tiny but original works in real space, and in passing, creating a new sense of what such "real space" could be. A_C_N 2014 Moon Map is especially insightful of these operations. The work is hung on the wall, whereas the composition forces the viewer to make a mental shift in perspective, as the subject matter was visibly photographed horizontally. The high-resolution digital technical camera gives the flat representation a tactility that comes in handy when remediating a three-dimensional assemblage in two dimensions, aided by the tactility of the materials. The leaves, feathers, and the ribbon all ooze softness and somehow, as a trompe l'oeil of palpability, manage to remain tangible in this digitally and dimensionally altered state. The moon map, then, is a readymade found in the garbage, an image that renders a ubiquitous cosmic body (spatial in every sense of the word) two-dimensional (its relatively low

resolution contrasts with Mu's print's quality). The flatness is emphasized by the three-dimensional objects sitting on top, casting their soft shadows, which are in turn transformed into two dimensions, first curled up, and then unrolled on the gallery walls. This concatenation of dimensional and perspective shifts provides the work with a sort of two-and-a-half dimensionality: flatness complemented by a mental sensitivity, the result of which only emphasizes, despite their absence, the materiality and spatiality of the photographed scene. The combination with the scale-wise minuscule adjacent objects provides the latter an anthropomorphism that resonates uncannily.

A C N 2014 Black Bath, the third series on view, are textiles suspended from the ceiling, printed with mysterious imagery. Their collective composition, seen from above, is in accordance with the form of the Unicorn constellation. This cosmic reference reinforces associations with grainy black and white planetary imagery, possibly in relation to the above mentioned moon map as well. Size-wise opposite, another association is the view of microscopic environments in Petri dishes, in which flowing and bubbly chemical substances seem to flourish. The series' title gives the actual nature of the images away: those swaying grayish flows and bubbles are photographs of the remainders of bath water and white foam in a tub. The beholder finds him/herself transforming the image into a projection of an inner image in the own mind. They are reconstructed constellations of another order, of the personal subconscious and the collective conscious, like meta-Rorschach imagery in the white cubes of contemporary art.

The theme of transformation that is active in each of these 'stations', 'ports', 'gateways' recalls Mu's biography. As an already trained but still young artist, she exchanged her native China for the Dutch provincial town of Enschede, leaving behind friends and family but also a general sense of belonging, confidence, and culture. The translocation may have been difficult, confusing, and unrewarding at times, but in the long run, it paradoxically decreased her fears and strengthened her self-confidence. In China even more than in the West, Mu explained me, there is a collective fear, resembling taboo, of poverty, loneliness, death, lack of success, and maybe of fear in general. Transcending her native cultural confines has taught her not only the relativity of beliefs and conventions. But part of those beliefs and conventions remain within her that allow for the counter-effect of major personal development, understanding the relativity of poverty and loneliness and gaining self-confidence and personality.

The works that mark the stops and the crossroads in the itinerary that Mu proposes in this exhibition seem symbols of transformation to me. It has been said that the major frame of reference here is value. So, what is the value of each of the metaphorical tickets that she travels by? The value, as the universal wisdom tells us, is in the trajectory itself. Not in the end goal or any final stop, it is rather in the transformation of the self that value is to be found.

There is value in transformation because it allows for a reinterpretation of the transposed, reframed and reformed while conceptually retaining some or any of its original features, like the marbles that, when kicked, performatively transform the gallery's white cube into a higher architecture, one of movement, sound and reflections, provoking reactions and position-taking with the visitors. The transformation of the canvas in the Black Diamonds - with the intellectual stimuli transforming the mind, and transformed by the body into traces of their becoming material – produce a meditative and productive value of abstract creation. The A Childish Nothingness transform disregarded common objects into white cube contemplation pieces, art value and all, and erect a dimensionality that is only possible in and through the perception and reflection of the beholder, underlining the worth of both imagination and rational, abstract thought. The Black Baths elaborate on this performance of the mind, that holy seat of imagination and projection, where our world, from microscopic to cosmic, takes shape, time and again, always slightly differently in each human being - the artist, the beholder, the imaginary concept of a person.

The title of the Black Diamond series, with its charcoal lines, alludes to the relationship between diamonds and charcoal, with their identical molecular carbon base that has been transformed into physical and cultural opposites through vastly incomparable circumstances. Similarly, the artist makes visible the antipodal components of works that embody transformation. The transformation of the artist's environments and the transformation of worldviews, including those of the viewer, are paralleled on the level of the art object: the artist is transformed while transforming.

Jesse van Winden (1986, NL) holds a research degree in Visual Arts, Media & Architecture (cum laude) from VU University Amsterdam. He is chief editor of Kunstlicht, a peer-reviewed journal for visual arts, visual culture, and architecture. He presented his research on concepts of persona various international conferences. For Kunstlicht, Van Winden prepares two journal issues on artists' personas, forthcoming fall and winter 2015.

"Instead of Going Against... Going Within"

Xue Mu & Kris Dittel / 2014

A Saturday afternoon conversation over a coffee, about agency, aesthetics and seduction between Xue Mu and Kris Dittel, Winter 2014.

Xue Mu: Do you remember the conversation we had at your place the other day? ,We were exchanging ideas on the lecture we saw by an English activist, who was focusing on the power of art but had dismissed it through his activities. We questioned the notion of "instead of going against something, working within... as a strategy?" Which I thought was interesting but I had to go home at that time... Do you want to tell me more about it now?

Kris Dittel: I think I was just very much opposed to his views, for instance he said that art is not the place for, or art is not capable of, making real change. First of all I totally disagree. Secondly he was doing these very direct actions and interventions, often in art institutions, or presenting them in an art context, but it sounded like an uninvolved hit-and-run strategy; making an action and then disappears, at least it did not appear very consistent. I think if it were about real change, a good strategy would be trying to effect change from within, to engage, to start a dialog, and that is a long-term process.

Xue: One of the first things I noticed when I came to the Netherlands in 2004, was that there was an emphasis on socially and politically engaged art. This was particularly highlighted in the 80's and the 90's. Many art works were conceived in light of certain social phenomena and were executed within such social contexts. At first I thought this seemed to be an innovative and exciting direction for art practice, but over time these socially engaged art shows lost their independence. It has become more an institutional supplement than genuine social engagement, or true interaction. Consequen-

tially, this kind of social political imagery became a particular aesthetic that lost its original impact. I did not investigate this phenomenon fully but I found it interesting when someone asks me: "Why don't you make political art? You are a Chinese artist." It has become a cliché when you are a Chinese artist you are expected to produce Chinese political imagery, especially when it's highly priced in the international art market.

My work doesn't fit into this expectation and I don't think it should. Art works that are political shows innovative spirits, no matter what subjects. Great art works inspire the others and extend boundaries of the conventional life experiences. They suggest to us the fundamental sense of freedom is in fact possible, which is in itself challenging.

Getting back to the socially engaged art in the West, in many cases when an artist declares that his/her work was engaged with people, it actually means that the artist was asking people to be engaged with his/her ideas; in this condition a 'socially engaged' artist is basically a 'socially supported' artist. Eventually when these works were shown in institutional context, the artist becomes the agent of the situation, the contribution of the people mostly remain anonymous. Nevertheless, when an artist is truly socially engaged, he/she needs to be prepared for a serious commitment that could be a lifelong investment.

Kris: I see what you mean, which is the question of agency, who has the right to say or advocate for whom, and in what conditions... when does something come from a real urgency, and when is it influenced by other factors.

Xue: It probably has always been the case but not easily addressed. I think it's necessary to be aware of the existing structure and learn how to work with it. Art system is highly institutionalized and highly market oriented now, when the circumstance demands artists to compromise, it is up to the artist what to compromise and how – to compromise on the content, on the form, or to sacrifice personal pleasure and time... there are freedoms within limits. It's not difficult to understand why sometimes the young artists would prefer to catch up with institutional expectations and produces works to fit in that demand. In some cases, there's no principle difference from art as tool for propaganda, only with a change of form.

Kris: It is also the responsibility of the curators to recognize genuine motivation when taking a position is necessary.

Xue: I agree, especially the curatorial discourse is becoming more and more prominent in art practice. Speaking about motivation and action, I have to think of what Boris Groys articulated in one of his lecture [1] On the Use of Theory in Art and Use of Art in Theory, whereby in one part he talked about the urgency of act in contemporary critical theory, referred to the frustration to contemporary culture and art that do not act politically efficiently, and why people should act more spontaneously. In his opinion, one "would be skeptical in any moves of act" to avoid failure, "People begin to act, only if they accept and internalize the failure as the ultimate possibility of their action". Today when artists apply political imagery that referencing the modernist aesthetics and structures of idea, its form has been evolved into something nostalgic and mysterious whilst the radical messages have been left behind. The truthfulness and freshness that is powerful in modernist art somewhat have been missed out in its contemporary look-alikes.

Kris: Is it possibly because a lot of people grew up with this aesthetics of modernism present in the Netherlands in architecture and art – all those ideas of artists and architects were very much revolutionary at the time. Perhaps the premise of a new utopia is what they (we) are drawn to... certainly there's an attraction and appreciation to this imagery and mentality, only from the outside, taking a stance from the distance in time. But we all embrace and influenced by those radical forefathers, instead of actually revolting against (them) or presenting an idea radically different from previous ones.

Xue: Of course that's possible. Looking at the modernist period and now, it's in a way comparable with Baroque and Rococo - Rococo art did not hold the spiritual struggle that Baroque art use to carry on - I could see the parallel of Rococo as where we are now: trying to grasp something attractive in its form but not necessarily carry on the spirit. And of course we are now at a different time and the content of struggle has changed - at least in the level of urgency. Now we are overloaded with media information, the explosions of media provides all kinds of insights offer great alternatives but the flip side is the confusions that have been generated... Perhaps the desire and effort of recalling Utopia is a bit of a pathetic attempt, but it's an attempt that makes sense.

Kris: I'm intrigued what you said about the relation between time and change – urgency and quick reactions. I like to think every decision is political – even withdrawal is political, and that withdrawal may give you time to think of a long-term strategy.

Xue: I suppose the word "urgency" implies that one has to act without expectations of success but with real forces. Groys

mentioned Che Guevara, the Cuban hero as an example [1]: Guevara is considered as big hero even though he failed after the revolution. What was powerful about Guevara is he was acting genuinely because he could "internalize failure as the ultimate consequence of his act" - probably the same mechanism also applies to Jesus, in the end "success is not enough a reason to act." When we are not paralyzed by our fear of failure, we stop being skeptical, we stop anticipating success and we can then really act and act for good reasons. And besides that, I can totally go alone with your idea of "withdrawal is political", in the last part of that lecture [1] Groys concluded by using the collapse of East Europe as example, "...the real change does not happen today in terms of something like French October revolution, but in terms of with draw of support from the acting institutions." " If you withdraw support from the acting institution, the institution collapse, because it can not survive in the competitive reality of contemporary way." - Real changes can happen silently, it does not necessarily happen from revolution that in my opinion is fundamentally radical.

Kris: Why do you decide not to use political imagery in your work?

Xue: I don't use political imagery mainly because of over the time it has become an iconic visual style. It no longer portrays radical ideas since its ubiquity in the art market, which has neutralized the power of its original context.

Now in Rotterdam there is an exhibition is presenting documentations on earlier Chinese contemporary art, called: *Hans van Dijk: 5000 names*, at Witte de With^[2]. The exhibition is dedicated to Hans van Dijk (Dai HanZhi), a Dutch man who has made great contribution to Chinese contemporary art. I was surprised to see those very early social conceptual Chinese art activities that were mainly underground, their messages was clearly appealing to me. I can relate to their points and believe in their intentions although some parts I disagree.

Hans van Dijk facilitated an introduction for many of those projects that were successful for the Chinese contemporary art to be recognized in the Western world. Once the market started to boom, all the critical messages that used to be underground and powerful, soon have turned into objects of Western commodity. By collecting and archiving the political spirit in another group of people, the collectors demolish its political content, which is a funny and contradictory attempt. Is that gesture and thus are those works still political after this? I don't think so. And what does that value stand for? I am not sure, but it's part of that game.

Kris: So what would be your way of dealing with such situation?

Xue: Ah I don't want to deal with any situation. When this booming was happening, I was a teenager who was interested in art and liked to collect art magazines. I did not want to be an artist but a designer at that time, so I went to the Visual Communication Department (the former Graphic Design department) in art academy. I believed in the power of design, especially at time of the early 2000's, visual elements weren't well organized in our daily surroundings: objects were badly made, things were unpractical and ugly. I thought that was the cause of the collective dissatisfaction. I believed that good design would bring quality and efficiency to our life, avoiding unnecessary waste and would bring direct, positive impact... Of course, I've been very naïve.

Kris: You have an exceptionally good sensitivity for objects: observing, assembling and choosing them. One can see your background as a designer in many levels of the work. At the same time I also have a feeling that you exaggerate this aesthetics.

Xue: Someone commented on the *Perpendicular Spontane-ity (2012)* photo series, saying it has a very sweet aesthetic; it shows lightness yet one could also feel something inherently dark. I was smiling when I heard this because of I like to learn about my work through the eyes of others, especially when it's beyond my anticipation. I don't think what has been perceived as dark is in fact dark. However on the level of perception, these still life photographs has shown an uncanny combination of objectivity and subjectivity; and on the level of aesthetic, its imagery has an alien and singular atmosphere that could be perceived as 'coldblooded'. But I don't consciously decide on this part, the aesthetic came out of the process of work. There are many autonomous experiences that are impossible to share with the others.

Kris: ... but you do share at the end.

Xue: I try to share. I want to see how unspeakable matters could be communicated. The first tryout was in 2012, a project I showed in the open studios at the Rijksakademie, it was an installation called *A Childish Nothingness V.S BOYS BLOW UPS*. I exhibited 10 small objects together with their blown up versions made by 10 male artists, to see how the small ones and the enlarged version could gain each other aother presence. In the meanwhile, I wanted to make a statement on my appreciation on the small and ignored objects, to critically reflect on the demands of being large from the masculine

standard in the current art market.

Kris: Do you like to work from this position? Not really knowing where things are going?

Xue: Not knowing where it leads you is the best way to explore, it can always be exciting - of course the precondition is that I must do my best to survive the adventure. I like the challenge, it often brings me to some little paradises. Those works that come from this kind of process always has one title: A Childish Nothingness (A_C_N). Being playful as a child and at the same time staying reflective. I have found precious things in this paradox.

Kris: I see, you are obviously avoiding political imagery, but in your work such as A_C_N V.S BOYS BLOW UPS and or the most recent A_C_N 2014 photo series, there's something else that it addresses; a highly aesthetical composition, that is seemingly very innocent, inducing introspection, but one starts to suspect a slippery seduction.

Xue: I became very aware of the language of this aesthetic as you can see the details in the new photos (A_C_N 2014) were highly emphasized through sophisticated camera manipulation, but in the mean while the objects themselves stayed innocent. I understand the seduction of this language but I don't think it is a matter of seduction only, especially in today's reality where we are meant to be seduced every day at all times for the sake of economic growth. Consumption is based on desire, and seduction creates it. However, when I try to understand seduction as a general concept, it is something relates to our survival instinct, which is a condition beyond judgment or integrity; in another word: it is natural to be seduced. Basically seduction indicates that danger is behind pleasure, it makes us feel fragile, and so life can be perceived even more intensively, it thus offers more dimensions in terms of existential experiences, and calls for more reflection.

Kris: When one looks at these extremely beautiful, exaggerated images, after a while the elements start to slowly decompose, and later one realizes how fragile and how mundane they are, even rubbish, something one wouldn't even notice by itself, they don't function as singularities, but in this combination they become...

Xue: Intense, yet purposeless.

Kris: To me, it works as critique of consumerism, where you get charmed by all kinds of pictures of commodity products in their beautiful setup, yet what is the essence of having it all, and why would I want to possess it all? How you think about this?

Xue: Try to imagine you are looking at an advertisement of a McDonald hamburger when you are very hungry, the quality of that image can definitely intensifies your desire. Luxury goods such as Coco Chanel and Christian Dior use the same platitide... what I do is to apply this on groups of insignificant objects. Technically there is no secret, but the out-comes are intriguing. Although I could anticipate these photographs were going to show things that are different than seeing from my own eyes, I would not know exactly how it would be until I see the result... Sometimes I was trying to seduce myself with this method and self-questioning: have I really experienced it all, or did I think I have had but in fact I have not?

If one compares A_C_N 2014 photo series with the comodity products advertised in magazines, when these insignificant objects haven been given the same intensity of emphasis, its imagery starts to "advertise" a totally different life philosophy, it manifests a detached attitude and that is rather seductive.

Kris: Can you relate this to a childhood experience, growing up in the time when the market economy entered the post-socialist countries, in the way people related to consumerism, where shopping malls were the symbol of development?

Xue: Perhaps we all shared this experience as a child: when you pass by the shop windows and attracted by the items on display that you couldn't afford to possess, or you could afford them but they would only give you a momentary pleasure. As a teenager I'd think 'this object is going to add up to my identity', but soon I realized this was more a social image that has been designed by someone I don't know - the moment when I understood this, I began to wonder, why would I let someone I don't even know to design my identity? Then I realized I've been simply seduced.

Kris: After the Berlin wall fell, all this desire of people to have Western products transformed into excessive consumption, and at the same time people focused on volume instead of value.

Xue: Similar situation happened in China during the 9o's. Suddenly there was boom of shops with glittery, attractive objects that had not been seeing. I remember it as a kid, going to the mall, feeling ashamed of my school uniform and confronted with a feeling combines fear and excitements... Ten years later, when I got my first job, I wanted to confront to this feeling and had moments of strong desire of buying things, but shortly after I'd questioning: what is the next thing and where is this all leading?

Kris: ...what is the next seduction? Up to what point can this need for the new thrill be pushed?

Xue: Haha~ I don't know. I am working on this series of imagery but I don't have interest to produce branded photographs. Things change, I can imagine one day when all secrets were discovered - if it would happen, I'd be tired of these little objects. But what I am sure of is this kind of childish, or childlike fragility makes me experience life as a constant changing mystery, yet a stable one: it is continuously showing something and hiding something. This sense of fragility can be very productive, and I always need to find intellectual tools to internalize these understandings.

Artists are expected to provide and to inspire, but when I try to relate art to where I came from, I begin to realize I don't make works for the others. In the last ten years, I've been looking closely at my internal doubts and founds, being as honest as possible - I'd say I have a selfish approach toward art making, for the fact that I can only be responsible for my own experiences.

Art is a fantastic way to deal with fundamental questions that rose within one-self. Since I see art as a life long practice, I want to be inspired by things I involve while trying to answer to my own existential questions. If the outcomes could be inspiring to another person, it would be a great pleasure and compliment.

*NOTES

[1]. On the Use of Theory in Art and Use of Art in Theory, Boris Groys, Studium Generale Rietveld Acadmie, Jan 2013.

[2]. Hans van Dijk: 5000 Names, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam. 4 Sep 2014 – 10 Jan 2015.

Kris Dittel (1983, Slovakia) is an (in)dependent curator based in the Netherlands. She holds an MSc in Economics and Social Sciences from Masaryk University, Czech Republic, and an MA in Arts and Heritage from Maastricht University, the Netherlands. As Associate Curator at the Bonnefantenmuseum between 2010 and 2013 she realized among others the exhibition Nachtfahrt at Bonnefanten Roermond and part of BACA Projects in collaboration with the Jan van Eyck Academie. Until 2013 she was a Board Member and Curator of the self-organized art initiative B32 in Maastricht. In 2013, Dittel took part in the curatorial residency programme at Schloss Ringenberg, Germany, followed by de Appel Curatorial Programme in Amsterdam in 2013/14. Dittel lives in Amsterdam and Eindhoven, and works as a curator at Onomatopee Project Space and Publisher and operates as one half of the research trajectory The Translation Trip.

'Large Enough To Reflect Upon': Xue Mu

By Jesse van Winden / November 2012

First published on Tubelight, 30 november 2012 http://www.tubelight.nl/articles/1384/rijksakademieopen-2012-xue-mu Several small, cheap objects are placed discreetly in a corridor between two studios. Many seem like mass-produced articles found somewhere: childlike, innocent, and cheap, but genuine in their appearance. They suggest that they were placed there in order to escape from the pretentions and alienation that often pervade the art world, as well the prestigious Rijksakademie. Who this fleeing perpetrator could be is revealed by the fact that both adjacent spaces are studios of the Chinese-born artist, Xue Mu. In one, she shows her own work, in the other a collaborative project is installed.

In the first room of the first space, four large photographs hang on the walls. What struck the artist was the perfection of spontaneously materialized still lives found in places like a desktop or a moving box. The small room forces one to stand close to the hugely magnified works, seemingly wrapped by them. The photographic two-dimensionality purges the tactility from the assemblages. Impression and expression seem tempted to coincide: 'To fetch the mark that the physical world leaves

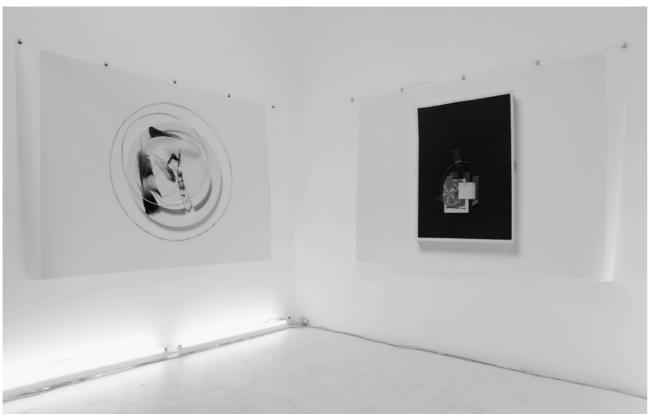


Photo: Perpendicular Spontaneity_The Other Moments, Installation view at RijksOPEN 2012 Photograph: Willem Vermasse





Photo: A Childish Nothingness v.s. BOYS BLOW UPS. Installation view at RijksOPEN 2012 Photoraph: Peter Tijhuis

on me, and recreate it so that others can take it in... *that* is my task,' Xue Mu explains. In the next room, something similar happens. Photographs show the overexposed movements of two dancers on whose bodies small lights were attached. They are transformed into 'light drawings', representing two clearly distinguished traces of movements.

A substantial amount of the Chinese art that we are familiar with is political in nature. Xue Mu has a twofold critique of this. As soon as the price of a so-

cially engaged work is raised, financial value becomes leading. Its 'spirit' and potential to alter people's worldviews is neutralized to something material. Furthermore, visualizing politics in our mediated society amounts to aestheticizing the political. 'Art about political subjects is something different than art of being political.' Xue Mu states. One of the ideas that she drafted with pencil on her studio wall is that political art equals 'being challenging.' The project in the other space demonstrates that this is not merely a vacant commonplace.

After various colleagues, mostly men, contended that Xue Mu's casually collected small objects would only really be 'art' when larger, she invited them to do precisely that: magnify them. Ten artists independently chose from many original objects, and subsequently remade it in a technique and size of their own choice. In the studio, both the 'models' and their derivations are presented. This project, A Childish Nothingness vs. BOYS BLOW UPS, is according to an exhibition text, not a form of participation art, but a critique of 'masculine criteria' that judges whether a piece is large enough to fit the category of 'art', large enough for the art market, or large enough to even reflect upon.

Small things, collected or self-made, seem to be able to function as spontaneously forged keys to the unconscious side of our daily universe: materiality charged with ephemeral impressions. Xue Mue's self-assured scaling up in one series, and her critique of it in another, demonstrates a friction between objecthood and the way it is experienced. The work problematizes at least two paradoxes and questions the antitheses – immateriality as opposed to materiality, impression as opposed to expression.

A Floating Highway

Art in Public Space, Commissioned by IAMA1 Manifestation 2009

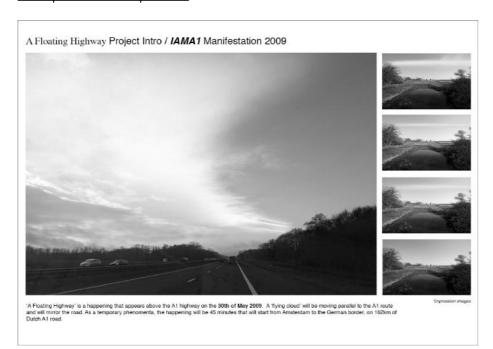
A Floating Highway was a forty minutes performance above the A1 highway, it was happening on the 30th of May, 2009.

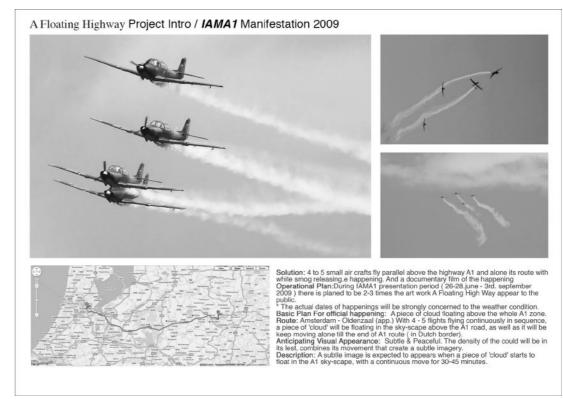
Four aircrafts produced a 168 kilometers long artificial cloud that mirrored the entire route of the A1 highway (from Amsterdam to the German border). Kunstenlab Deventer commissioned this project in 2008.

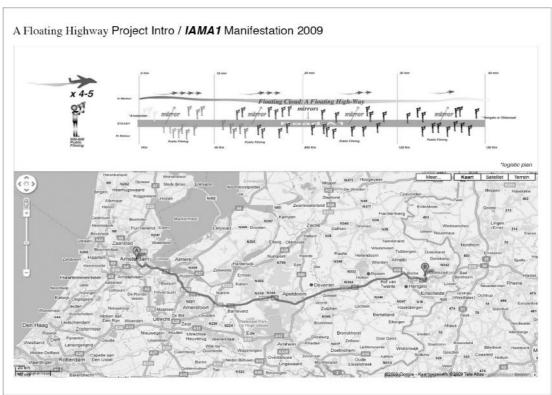
Public along the A1 route has filmed this happening. A collection of footages from hundreds of spectators, using different kinds of video equipment shown various image qualities were edited into a complete registration of the flying "cloud".

During the summer of 2009, the documentary film A Floating Highway was screened in a mobile cinema, as one of the six artworks in IAMA1 manifestation on the A1 highway.

Concept and Visual Impression:







The Frenetic Trace

Mark Kremer / October 2012

Over the last three years the artist Xue Mu has produced a body of large-scale drawings in charcoal under the overall title *Black Diamond*. What characterizes the works is a specific type of recurring abstract mark making that is suggestive of movement and speed. The procedure evokes the connotation of traces left by someone as an ambiguous indication that (s)he has both found and lost the way.

There are three series' of six individual pieces. They re-

veal how a certain idea of abstraction can grow in relation to the development of the artist's interests and the continued engagement with that very idea. Drawings in the first series are named after remote galaxies and distant stars; the traces build dense interlocked and accumulated crisscross patterns that refer to, among other stuff, the eternal traffic of celestial bodies and their orbits. These works somehow seem to fathom dark matter. The appearance of the second series by contrast, seems more airy. The mark making is finer, there is more light, and they give the distinct impression of a mind.

In fact, these works were made in response to electronic music, and created by a style of drawing that emerged from dance.

The third series stages the conflict between the two poles that I mentioned above, matter and spirit. This series is a permanent installation at the Provinciehuis in Leeuwarden, a government seat. Power and beauty, politics and art are in fact, and in the words of the artist, their thematics. In the works, the spectator notices a certain schizophrenia: trajectories of lines are broken off prematurely; strong contrasts of light and dark zones catch the eye, and there is a sense of an imprint of overall chaos that at any time could make a seamless slide into some kind of odd harmony. Perhaps.

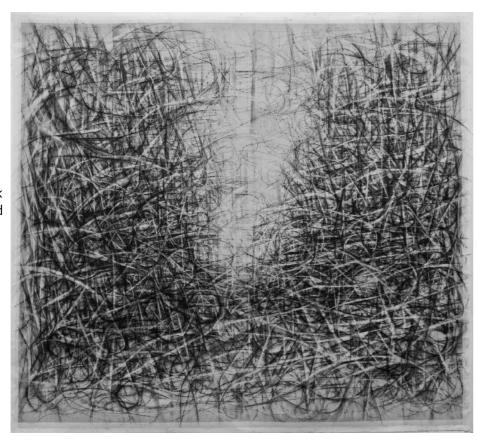


Photo: Black Diamond_Aldebaran, 2010 - 2011



Photo: Panorama, 2012. Permanent site-specific installation, in the 18C monument central meeting room Provinciehuis Friesland, Leeuwarden.

But apart from such explanations something else is at stake in the drawings, and it makes them really interesting: they're driven by a force that goes its own way, independent of their maker's. Central to Xue Mu's drawings is the notion of the frenetic trace. The frenetic trace is much more than an index of movement and speed, a hand making its marks on a paper surface. The frenetic trace is self-contained, it so much wants to act that, when it can only be, it rather prefers to disappear completely. The frenetic trace has no memory, it only knows a present tense, it can merely redo what it just did, erase and then retrace its former steps.

The unconditional embrace of the present: that is what we notice in these works. I would argue that the embrace of the present is also the embrace of everything. It is the response of the artist to the world that she finds herself in today, and that began with a series of artistic

explorations of nothingness – a notion that deserves to be meditated upon (*A Childish Nothingness*). Today we are witnessing its flipside.

Mark Kremer is an independent curator, art writer and tutor based in Amsterdam. Recent exhibitions: The Projection Project (MuHKA, Antwerp 2006-07; Mücsarnok, Budapest 2007), To Burn Oneself with Oneself: the Romantic Damage Show (De Appel, Amsterdam, 2008), KAAP/the little biennale 5 (Fort Ruigenhoek, Utrecht, 2010) and Porta Nigra (Hidde van Seggelen Gallery, London, 2012-13). Current projects: essay on encounters of Psychedelia and Conceptualism in the art of the 1960s and today, and the exhibition When Elephants Come Marching In: Psychedelia and Conceptualism are Reconciled (De Appel, Amsterdam, September 2014).

PORTRAIT PROJECTS

Dance Dance Dance

2012 On-going

Five young people expose five inner worlds in dance.

Paolo Yao (IT), IJbert Verweij (NL), Gover Meit (NL/CW), Ida Fridan Edersen (DK) and Xue Mu (CN). Having different cultural backgrounds, raised with different ideologies and living different attitudes, they all got intoxicated by dance. Their characteristic empowering body dynamics is attractive as well as intimidating. Moving skills and total expression, the openly exposed desire, search, struggle and joy, can be acknowledged as rarely exposed yet profound existential state of mind.



Photo registration: Dance_IJbert Verweij, 2012

Photo registration: Dance movements _IJbert Verweij, 2012



Photo registration: Light Dance_IJbert Verweij, 2012



Video registration: Dance_Gover Meit, 2012. Camera: Reinilde Jonkhout

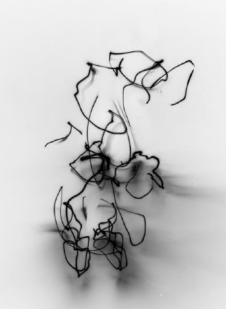


Photo registration: Light Dance_Gover Meit, 2012 Camera: Reinilde Jonkhout

PORTRAIT PROJECTS

Acting while living, believing, loving and performing

Asterisks for Portrait 2.

Ubert Verweij_Ubert Verweij

A performance by Xue Mu featuring IJbert Verweij at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, November 2013

Curator: Hendrik Folkerts & Britte Sloothak

Text: Jesse van Winden "Jesus thought it was very mean that all the animals in the zoo were captured in cages, just for the fun of the humans. He thought it would be a good idea to open all the gates, so the animals could walk around freely. And I said "no, you better not do that, because then it will be an enormous chaos." but Jesus did not want to listen to me and he opened all the cages so all the animals were running around and the people were very afraid and panicking and running out of the zoo. The guards managed to capture all the animals and put them back in their cages."

- Excerpt from elementary school paper 'A day with Jesus', translated on stage.

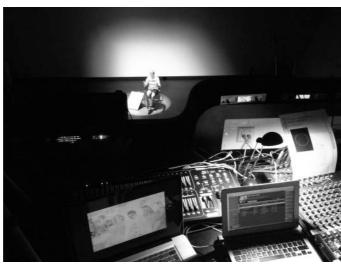


Photo: Portrait 2. IJbert Verweij_*IJbert Verweij* Location: Teijin Auditorium, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

* The title of Xue Mu's 2nd portrait project: IJbert Verweij _Jbert Verweij might suggest a video portrait with human interest-like interviews. However, this is more forward thinking than that. The portrait is a performance during which IJbert Verweij, a young, professional actor, is on stage all by himself. Verweij is present not merely as actor representing a role, but also as an individual, and as an expressive dancer—which he does not show until the very end. While he unfolds a verbal narrative that touches on various key moments in his life, Xue Mu is ostensibly only there to operate a projector and sound equipment from a distance at an angle that



Photo: Portrait 2. IJbert Verweij_IJbert Verweij, the church scene.

barely allows the two to communicate. But in fact, she has initiated and purged Verweij's autobiography staged here. From lengthy conversations and rehearsals she selected the material, and perhaps most definingly, her signature adorns the performance. While Verweij's name provides the title, Mu ultimately is the artist, the *auteur* of the work.

As an opening statement, tacitly introducing the main themes of *his* performance, Verweij gazes contemplatively upon a drawing of a church that rests on the floor beside his chair. Classical music is playing. As if Mozart's Requiem reminds him, he firstly speaks of is his father, who would prepare a Sunday breakfast for the family, with IJbert still in bed slowly waking up to the music coming from the living room. The framed drawing is something he picked up from the garbage, not knowing why. Soon, he regretted bringing that religious symbol; people could think he was an old, stiff person. In-

stead, he wanted to get rid of these childhood feelings for the church. Beautiful youth memories are accompanied with the difficulties linked to them – parental authority, for one. There is a struggle here that would be ironic if it was not so existential: contemplating to come to terms with one's spirituality here is suggesting to be mediated by social desires. Ironic, because religious faith may also be considered nurtured and channelled in a socially anchored context. At the centre of this tension between introspection and extroversion, the drawing symbolises an affection for the church that has become intrinsic, almost instinctive, which occurs to Verweij at the same time as an equally genuine repulsion for it.

Social disposition is a recurrent motive in the performance, one that sometimes suggests

that our social nature may well be a driving force in our selfperception. Shame over masturbation, for example, may be familiar to most, but at stake here is that this shame exists in relation to others rather than being self-contained: IJbert was nervous, feared that everyone could see it from his face. When attending acting classes at a young age, he fell in love with a girl he met there. An embarrassment felt over things very close to oneself is accentuated here by the trembling voice Verweij cannot suppress while recalling standing in front of her, hiding in the costume storage room of the acting class, undressing. The beauty of this naked girl made him afraid. The angst is still tangible in the slight insecurity of his delivery when facing the audience. The guilt he felt afterwards was caused by a fear for being punished by god - "the devil is going to get me", Verweij guotes himself – but stemmed from social control and the imposition of ethics by the church and other authorities. To see Verweij confiding this to the audience is painful, but in a genuine way.







Photo: Portrait 2. IJbert Verweij_IJbert Verweij, childhood memories of going to church on Sundays.

Performing may be seen as a form of confession. Redemption is far from impossible, because in terms of characterization, the instance that could redeem Verweij seems to be his very conscience. Few environments are typically as emotionless and sterile as the museum space. It becomes a space full of tensions when it accommodates an act — a (self-)portrait — as personal and psychologically intimate as Verweij's: there is a tension between the expectations that come with performance art in an institution for contemporary art, and an honest, psychology-infused exposure of the self that is almost unthinkable on that stage. The white cube becomes a confessional box.

* The five acts of the performance are separated by musical intermezzos that connect various themes. The second act is introduced by a vaguely Asian-sounding, toy-like experimental electronic rendering of Psalm 1 with children's voices. After returning from Nepal where his parents were development-aid workers, Verweij experienced the sheer impenetrability of his classmates. Not necessarily because they excluded him actively, but because he was new and from a strange background, while they already knew each other and were a close group. Their questioning never quite went away. His theatre hobby also didn't help, as that was considered gay somehow, while his acting mates for their part found it strange he was a Christian. He would come up with tricks to divert the attention over acting rehearsal tasks he didn't know how to deal with.

It is as if Verweij and Mu want to show that we only

live through the eyes of others. Here, Mu drew inspiration from Boris Groys' notions on the relation between life and thought, as she explains later in private. Contemplation has come to mean death, and life is believed only to be lived if socially, as Groys observes. Critical theory, he argues, calls for action to change the world, instead of trying to understand it, but philosophy in general (and critical theory with it) is focused on persuasion and transformation as much as the advertisement industry is. A desire for presence, for being 'now' calls for following others, causes a desire to be social - but the kind of 'social' like the media disseminating those commercially produced lifestyle images that, like magic, transmits the masses a knowledge of what is commonly, globally considered attractive and thus worthwhile adapting. This is what Mu seems to refer to when she speaks of "being taken at Facebook value", discussing the

enhanced amount and simultaneous inflation of social expression. The truly social is important to us on a much more urgent level, according to Groys. If life precedes thought, the social precedes life: "my life is always an image in the I of the others." Verweij and Mu work on the distance between life and thought in a special way: reflecting upon Verweij's (social) life almost therapeutically, and at the same time, verbalizing his thoughts by enacting them on stage. Life equals self-exposure, equals art, equals contemplation, may equal life.

Departing from a fascination for the relationship between dance or motion idioms and personality, the Portrait series for Mu functions as a project to offer a stage and a preparatory trajectory to artists with different backgrounds. Transcending her primary praxis as a visual artist proper, Mu enters into dialogue with her collaborators to build upon their own work in a way that is reflective and critical, but also organic. Another instance of a drive for honesty and genuineness, is for Mu to have Verweij expressing himself through acting, as naturally as when dancing – Verweij originally caught Mu's attention dancing at a party of mutual friends. His life story is her material to extract a script from, and for him to improvise on. This way, Verweij's script is Mu's portrait of him. Dancing freely – that is, intuitively moving within one's idiom with its own style, patterns, and particularities, without choreography or self-censorship – seems to offer a model and a creative analogy for being oneself, for relating to oneself in harmony, even in the face of an audience. At the time of the performance, the portrayal shows itself in the guise of a self-portrait. The visual artist is here revealed as a



Photo: Portrait 2. IJbert Verweij_ IJbert Verweij, body movements and introspection.

director and a dramaturge.

An epiphany Verweij had as an adolescent centres the attention on the theme of personal freedom. The experience was triggered by a performance of Jan Fabre's Parrots and Guinea Pigs. This Grotowski-like explicit physical theatre where actors "were nearly animals", first shocked Verweij to tears. He saw a primal freedom he had been missing and looking for from a need to be allowed to desire certain things, things he even renounced himself. The unabashed and applauded instinctivity and sensuality he saw with Fabre's actors made Verweij imagine himself being as liberated an actor, as free a man, possibly, in the future. During the performance Verweij relates frequently to the many ways in which he has attempted to reach this, as a goal, ultimately resulting here in the embodiment of this search: a man who is able, in public, on stage, to account of his being as an actor in every sense of the word.

Polish theatre innovator Jerzy Grotowski calls his approach to theatre 'therapeutic': a total act of physical and mental exposure. "The important thing is to use the role as a trampoline, an instrument with which to study what is hidden behind our everyday mask - the innermost core of our personality - in order to sacrifice it, expose it." The goal of Grotowski's emphasis on confrontation and disarming was catharsis, both within the actor and the spectator. In psychotherapy, particularly Freudian psychoanalysis, catharsis is the act of expressing, or more accurately, experiencing the deep emotions often associated with events in the individual's past which had originally been repressed or ignored, and had never been adequately addressed or experienced. Here, until the dancing finale of the performance, Verweij addresses his past and his personality verbally rather than physically, weighing up his decisions, his development, his norms. In the most refined instances, he speaks to himself as much as to the audience, scrupulously. Conscience exists here as an implied social agency, as a partner-actor, as a friend.

* While Verweij disapproves of his parents' strictness and moral conservatism, he admires their search and drive for self-development. In a particularly touching scene he reads out loud a birthday card from his mother. It testifies of their emotional distance despite mutual attempts towards expression and understanding. Not only his parents and the church gave IJbert a hard time during his youth; he resisted authorities continuously, especially their frequent lack of reason and justice, as if it were a theme in his life. Since having seen Parrots and Guinea Pigs it had been Verweij's dream to be part

of Fabre's company. When effectively participating in one of his master classes, Verweij was punished for a mistake he made. Fabre challenged Verweij to pick up all cigarette butts thrown on the pavement, or leave. After rejecting a brief antiauthoritarian sentiment within himself, Verweij picked up all the cigarette butts. Later, it seemed decided that he would effectively join the company. Everybody knew it. During the decisive talk, Fabre announced that he was indeed admitted, and asked if he had any questions. Verweij did have one: "What does de audience need to do with all we are doing on the stage, the sexual things, the very violent things?" After forcing him to think about his own question for a week, Fabre ruthlessly denied Verweij's early reassurance that he definitely wanted to join. After the week was finished, he appeared to have hired someone else in the meantime. If the story is correct, Verweij seems to have been rejected simply because he did not blindly submit.

Authority, in the guise of parents, church, school, or a theatre director, is demonstrated here as a given power which is higher in rank, which will out of nature subject you to a status of inferiority – almost nonchalantly, in passing, even if it cares and nurtures and considers you one of them, even if it has won your trust and admiration. In a way, any social constellation embodies a kind of authority to each socially inclined individual related to it. It seems like Verweij always had to behave differently in order to relate to this variety of sometimes heavily conflicting contexts. Not fitting in anywhere, he always had to act. Verweij grew up to be a performer, it could be said (as a matter of fact, he states he wanted to be an actor since childhood). Living through the eyes of others, one anxiously perceives and manipulates the masks one wears to interact with them.



Photo: Portrait 2. IJbert Verweij_IJbert Verweij, the clown scene.

In classical drama, a role is played by an actor skilled to represent a character as realistically as possible. Bertolt Brecht unravelled this 'Aristotelian' unity of actor and character, in favour of a visible disjunction of the two. In order to make the audience aware of the historicity and the political conditions of the staged events, Brecht propagated emphasis on the artificiality of theatre and reflection upon the act of staging and role-playing instead. Instead of empathy with the characters, spectators could then reflect consciously and critically on the contents of the play. By way of Verfremdung – making 'strange' what is familiar – actors made their awareness of their acting explicit to the audience, who in turn perceived the acting and the acted as separate things. Brecht, who did not reject the ideal of credibility of character, solved this by making his actors internalize their role through a social consciousness.

Verweij's performance here elaborates on these notions by way of showing that characterization on stage is even more complex than an actor clearly representing a role. Verweij is an actor playing a role which reflects on the individual hidden behind the actor. It is a role, rather than a personality made transparent: the autobiographical facts, however sincere, are fictionalized per definition. These modes, actor, character and individual are embodied by one figure, but are not the same. They are shaped through one another, accumulative and barely distinguishable. Verweij's 'stage persona' is part of an individual who plays various roles, as if he were wearing different masks in different social situations. Other parts include his capacities of son, a rebel against his parents, Christian, someone coming to terms with his spirituality, a school kid trying to bridge the gap to his classmates,

and so forth. Brecht's influential colleague Erwin Piscator contended that moral, spiritual or sexual conflicts are essentially conflicts with society. Comparably, Verweij's emotional life can be considered a reflection of his social life.

* The dancing climax, then, is meaningful in another way. It's difficult to say whether Verweij effectively experiences the catharsis that he seemed to strive for, but an emotional

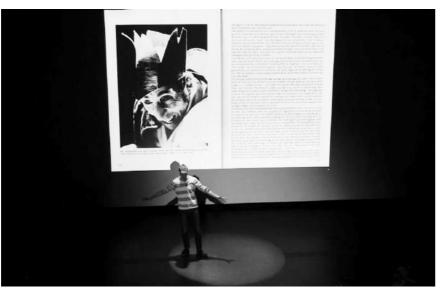


Photo: Portrait 2. IJbert Verweij_IJbert Verweij, the clown scene.



Photo: Portrait 2. IJbert Verweij_IJbert Verweij, the dance scene.

release of all that is said is certainly catalyzed into a language that transcends the cognitive. Just as he once made a decision to stop talking (because there was already too much talk) Verweij starts to move around, liberated in a way, finding a groove that emerges from his inner drives, a final approach to unmediated, sincere expression, this time non-verbal. All his life up until now, IJbert Verweij has needed to find attitudes

towards different social spheres with very different rules and values. While relating to these spheres always demands a definition of one's own rules, which are always confronting and confusing, the language of the individual body through dance very differently confined by social rules. Different to such a degree that it may escape the protocol of many subcultures altogether. Bodily self-expression becomes autonomous automatically when one has liberated his or her body from a fear of being. Here, Xue Mu has left out spoken messages, simply to let the dancer dance.

* The tragedy of *Portrait 2: IJbert Verweij* is twofold. If Verweij found liberation through the catharsis of reconsidering his conscience on this stage, he managed heroically through acting, in a fictionalized form. He may have gotten closer to himself, but by choosing certain roles. He may have found himself, but through developing a stage persona.

On the other hand, Verweij always struggled with authorities and had ambivalent relationships with many of the major carriers of meaning in his life. A search for freedom from rule-and role-dictating antagonists has finally resulted here in an elaborate reflective process which seems to have made possible this immense act of sincere, naked, self-reconciliation. However, not only does this finally take shape in a public setting, within the confines of a staged, fictionally periceived moment where acting would be anticipated, it also takes place within a project that bears the signature of Xue Mu, it happens under the patronage of another.



Photo: Portrait 2. IJbert Verweij_IJbert Verweij, the dance scene.

Plan for Installation

Xue Mu / June 2014

Work Title: A Childish Nothingness 2014_Old Tiles, The Davids, Black Bath.

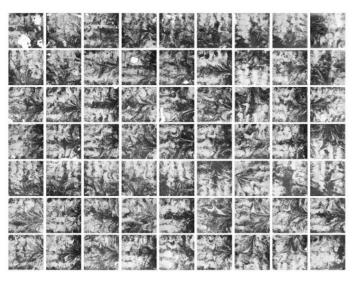
"A human being is part of a whole, called by us the 'Universe", a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is kind of a prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

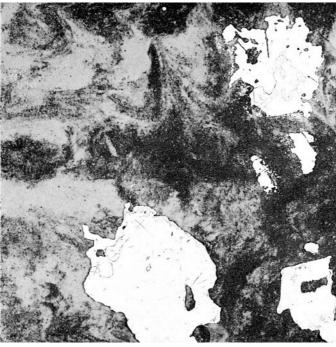
-- Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

This installation consists of three parts. Each part takes an unusual association to Einstein's definition of 'delusion' and 'all living creatures'.

Part 1. Old Tiles

63 photo etchings as one installation, it represents the bathroom floor in an old apartment the artist used to live. Through daily usage, the artist found portraits of herself, her friends and strange creatures In their amorphous patterns.





* One of the 63 images from A_C_N 2014 Old Tiles. According to the artist, this image shows the profiles of a boy, a girl and a white clown. However you may see something totally different.

* Old Tiles. 63 photo etchings in order of the original bathroom tiles. (Known as Winkelman tiles made in the Netherlands during 1960's.)

Camera: Fan Liao





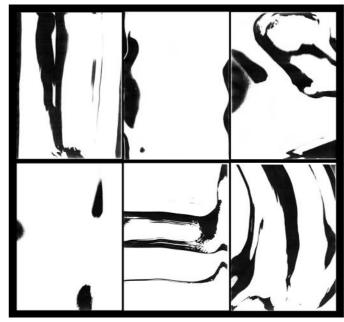
* For example, the left-upper part of tile no.R5-6 resembles profile of the German electronic musician and noise artist Felix Kubin.

Part 2. The Davids_No.1-No.6



The 6 carpets are the transformations of Michelangelo's David, the paragon of male beauty and strength from the Italian Renaissance. Using xerographic, this famous sculpture is deformed into duplicable abstract patterns. It eventually laid down softly and ready to be walked over.

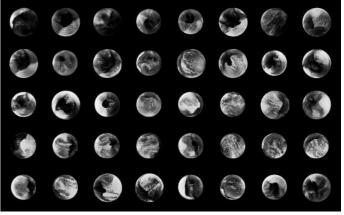
* Michelangelo's David transformed into 6 carpets by Xero-graphic.



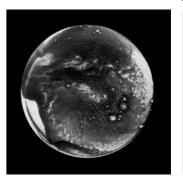
* The Davids No.1-No.6

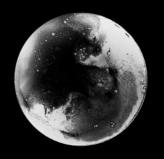
Part 3. The Black Bath

The standing structure refers to the Big Dipper (a constellation within Ursa Major) and Ping-Feng (Chinese traditional room-divider, applied for Feng-Shui and providing privacy). The planet-assembled images are snapshots from a black bathtub the artist has used.

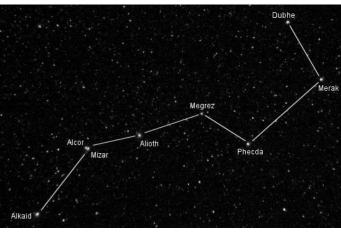


* Black Bath, 40 moments of the moving fluid. Camera: Fan Liao

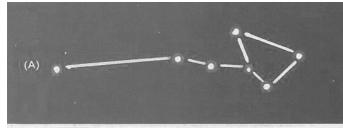


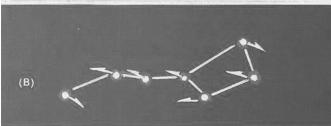


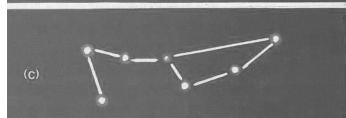
*The planet-assembled imagery. Camera: Fan Liao



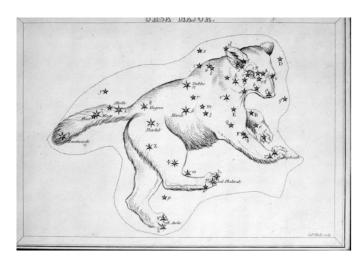
* Big Dipper







- * Big Dipper, change of stars' positions in period of 300,000 years.
- A) Stars' position 100,000 years previous.
- B) Current stars position
- C) Stars' position 100,000 years later.



* Ursa Major constellation, also known as Big Bear.

CONCEPT SUMMERY:

By registering detailed observations of daily life, this installation visualizes the personal and internal experiences of the artist, with the suggestion that any momentary or individual experience can be associated with esoteric subjects (and viseversa) when common logic is suspended. The artist believes that exploring individual experiences does not only generate deeper curiosity inside of oneself, it also echoes the curiosity of others.

Individual experiences shape the collective consciousness in a subtle and definite way. If inspiration can be found in things that are generally ignored, as a shared experience, it opens up a new dimension in the collective consciousness and refreshes the definition of value. At the same time it can extend the perception of the physical world.

*The embedded images are visual reference, they do not represent the installation. The final presentation is adjusted to the condition of the space.

Xue Mu Jun. 2014

- VISUAL APPENDAGE -

A CHILDISH NOTHINENESS 2014

- Old Tiles
- The Davids_no.1-no.5
- Black Bath_Ursa Major

Installation view at exhibition: When Elephants Come Matching In, Curated by: Mark Kremer 26 Sep. 2014 – 11 Jan. 2015, de Appel Arts Centre.



Photo: A_C_N 2014. Detail of installation.



Photo: A_C_N 2014, Black Bath_Ursa Major. Installation view.



Photo: A_C_N 2014, Old Tiles. Installation view.



 $Photo: A_C_N\ 2014\ ,\ Old\ Tiles\ ,\ The\ Davids_no.1-no.5\ ,\ Black\ Bath_Ursa\ Major.\ Installation\ view$



29

Photo: A_C_N 2014, Old Tiles. Details.

Biography

Xue Mu (b. 1979 Nanjing, CN) is a visual artist based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She received BFA from Gerrit Rietveld Academie, MFA from DAI (Dutch Art Institute), and art in residency at de Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in 2011 and 2012.

Like many people, Xue Mu experiences the ideological confusion and identity struggle in the present time of globalization. She questions and reflects on the inevitable loss of current belief systems, and concentrates on doubt, curiosity and awareness regarding new value orientations and future potential.

In her art projects Mu articulates the existence of un-seen experiences - they underline the unmediated experiences in daily life observations. Her projects can be viewed as footprints on an exploring path of fundamental subjects, such as the values of existential experience, and critical reflections on individuality within notions of cultural identity and ideology.

Her recent projects incorporate: large drawing series, installation environments, photographs and performances.

Mu has been commissioned for art projects in public space, such as A Floating Highway for IAMAI in 2009, Mr. Ray for the Breukelen railway station in 2010, Strange Light for Houten Castellum in 2012 and Panorama for Proviciehuis Friesland in Leeuwarden in 2012.

C.V

EDUCATION AND RESIDENCY

2011 - 2012

Art in residency, Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, NL 2006 - 2009

Gerrit Rietveld Academie, BFA Amsterdam, NL

2004 - 2006

Dutch Art Institute/ArtEZ, MFA Enschede, NL

1998 - 2002

NanJing Art Institute, BFA Nanjing, CN

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

2015

10-13 Sep 2015

Photo Shanghai. with YeoWorkshop at Shanghai Exhibition Centre, CN

21 May - 7 Jun 2015

IN.NO.SENSE.

Curator at Leerling and Meester Project commissioned by Kunstpodium T, Tilburg, NL

25 - 29 Mar 2015

Art Paris. wtih YeoWorkshop at Grand Palais, Paris, FR

30 Jan 2015

CHINA HERE Confrontations.

Presentation and roundtable discussion at AAA Festival, ConcertGebouw and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, NL

2014

21 Nov 2014 - 11 Jan 2015

(Solo) A CHILDISH NOTHINGNESS.

YeoWorkshop, Singapore

26 Sep - 11 Jan 2014

When Elephants Come Marching In.

de Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam, NL

8 Sept 2014

Day of the Young Artist.

Artists talk with Thom Puckey, Museum De Pont, Tilburg, NL.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS AND ART FAIRS

2014

ON STAGE. KARST, Plymouth, UK

Art Rotterdam. with Gallery Gabriel Rolt, Rotterdam, NL Théâtre de l'absurde. Gallery Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam, NL

2012

Portrait No.2 IJbert Verweij_IJbert Verweij. Performance public program Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam, NL.

DRAWING, EXPRESSION and LIMIT. AMNUA, Nanjing, CN. LOCAL FUTURE. He Xiangning Art Museum, ShenZhen, CN.

Portrait No.1 Paolo Yao MONDOS. International Stilte Festival, Breda, NL

M#. mini-solo at Art Brussels. with Gallery Gabriel Rolt, NL

The Armory Show. with Gallery Gabriel Rolt, NY, US

Art Rotterdam. with Gallery Gabriel Rolt, Rotterdam, NL

(Solo) ICE AGE. Artstage Singapore, Yeo Workshop, London, UK

2012

O-L-O-G-Y. Collective project at Amstel 41, Amsterdam, NL. RijksOPEN. Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, NL. THE RESEARCH AND DESTROY DEPARTMENT OF BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE. W139, Amsterdam, NL.

(Solo) A CHILDISH NOTHINGNESS & BLACK DIAMOND. Gallery Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam, NL.

Art Rotterdam. with Gallery Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam, NL. Art Singapore. with Gallerie 8, London, UK.

2011

RijksOPEN. Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, NL. Art Amsterdam. with Galerie Gabriel Rolt, RAI, Amsterdam, NL

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Art Rotterdam. with Galerie Gabriel Rolt, Rotterdam, NL Art Amsterdam. with Galerie Gabriel Rolt, Amsterdam, NL

2009

IAMA1. A1 Project, Kunstlab, Deventer, Kunstcentrum Hengelo, Kunstvereniging Diepenheim, NL

GRA End-Exam. Gerrit Riteveld Academie, Amsterdam, NL Ruhezeit Abgelaufen. Kunstfort bij Vijfhuizen, Vijfhuizen, NL

2008

KAAP (De Keline Biennale). Fort Ruigenhoek, Utrecht, NL

COMMISSIONS

2013

Golden Hours. Sketchopdracht art in public space Buishuis Tramplein, Purmerend, NL (not realized)

2012-2014

Strange Light. Art in public space, Houten Castellum, Houten, NL

Panorama. Permanent Site-specific installation, Friesland Province House, Leeuwarden. NL (realized)

2010

Mr. Ray. Breukelen Station, Sketchopdracht art in public space ProRail and NS, Breukelen, NL (not realized, with publication)

2009

A Floating Highway. Art in public space, IAMA1/2009, NL (realized)

Contemplation. Site-specific installation for KAAP, Utrecht, NL (realized)

Celebration. Art in public space, UT Twente, Enschede, NL (not realized, with publication)

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

2012 - 2014

Project fond for A Childish Nothingness, Amsterdam Fonds voor de Kunst, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

2012

Prof. Augustus Allebé Fonds / Willem F.C. Uriôtfonds Fellowship

2011

Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds, Peter paul Peterich Fonds, the Netherlands

Berlagefonds, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, the Netherlands.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Guest lecture at DAI (Dutch Art Institute), Arnhem, NL Guest lecture at Royal Academy of Art, Den Haaq, NL

Guest lecture at ArtEZ, fine art Arnhem, NL

Member of Jury at HAFF Holland Animation Film Festival, Utrecht, NL

SELECTED CATALOGUE AND PUBLICATIONS

2015 IN. NO. SENSE #0

2014 A CHILDISH NOTHINENESS, Xue Mu

2013 Local Future

2013 Drawing, Expression and Limit

2012 RijksOPEN 2012

2012 Het Huis

2011 RijksOPEN 2011

2010 Sluipweg

2010 Heart Beat Iran

2009 Here as the center of the world

2009 A1/IAMA1

2008 KAAP

2007 *Celebration*

SELECTED ARTICLES & PRESS

2014 AMC magazine, Zonder Compositie

Author: Tinike Reijders

2013 Het Parool, Art in Red Light 9.

2012 TubeLight Rijsakademie Open 2012:Xue Mu.

Author: Jesse van Winden

2011 Het Parool, Zwierige en nerveuze houtskoolgolfjes
Author: Jan Pieter Ekker

2011 Mister Motley, A Childish Nothingness & Black Diamond Author: Thijs Titts

2009 De Stentor, Nieuws Deventer

2009 RTV Oost (Radio & TV station Provincie Overijssel)

2009 NOS Journaal (Dutch national TV 8:00h news)

2009 Radio 1 (live radio interview)

2009 Radio 3 (taped interview)

2009 AD (National newspaper)

2008 A1 / 002 Nov NSKRNT

2008 De Kantlijn, "Beeld Uit het Zuiden", feburary edition.

2008 NRC Kunst, "Cultuur, maarmet mate, en dan vooral voor de kinderen" zaterdag 31mei & Zondag 1 juni. Author: Sandra Smets

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