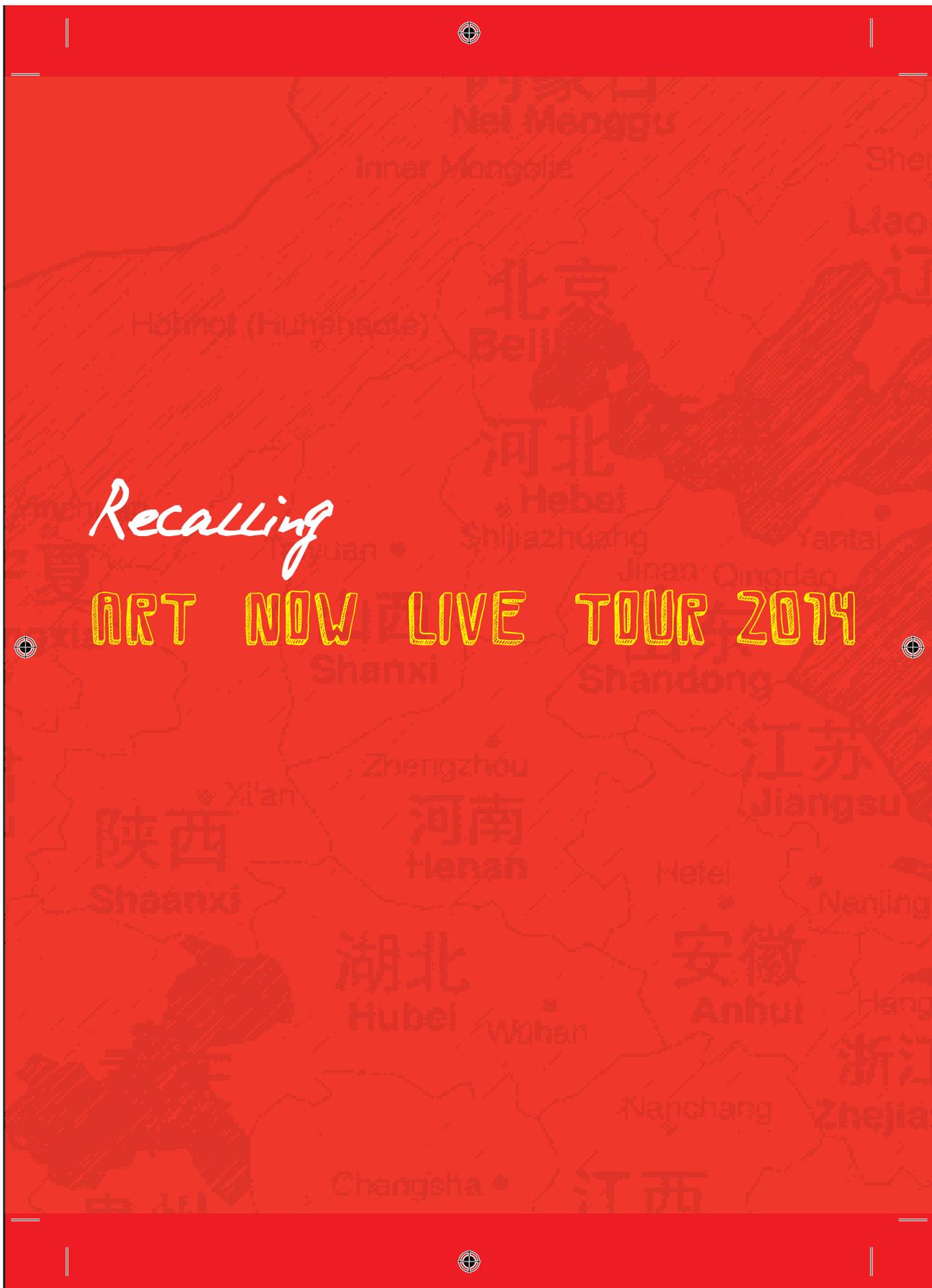


Recalling

ART NOW LIVE TOUR 2014



Daniela, Ezzam and Sophia Natasha
wish to thank the following individuals and organisations for their support:

Cai Qing
Chen Jin
Jason Lim



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Introduction

1 Performance art is intangible and ephemeral.
Performance art is real and, potentially, authentic.
2 Performance art is an artistic experience shared, nay, created by artist and audience
at a certain time, in a certain space.
8 Performance art brings people together.
1 Performance art talks to our whole and complex self in many ways that go beyond
reason and conventional language.
5 Performance art lives in the present and once it shifts to the past, it becomes
something else.
6 For Ezzam, Sophia Natasha and myself, performance art is all this and much more.
It is an artistic practice we believe has unlimited potentials. We choose it, because
of what we see it does and what we sense it can do, both to others and ourselves.
8 We are passionately committed to it, as we are committed to grow in it, through a
constant and diligent practice that includes failure as well as success. We take a
9 professional and serious approach in our own individual artistic visions: we not only
investigate, but we also distil our experiences through an aesthetic filter that shapes
1 our performances and, collectively, our entire practice in its unrelenting and steadfast
3 progress. We exercise criticism and self-reflection, as post-performance discourse to
enhance our sensibilities for more poignant and involving works and to expand our
openness to unexplored territories.
4 The editing of this booklet hinges around three main ideas: in the first we offer our
personal take on selected aspects of the tour; in the second we present a self-
reflection on both our own performances, in Beijing and Linzhou, and in the last we
offer a critique on two performances from other artists.
5 We are therefore pleased to present this booklet, which charts the journey we
made to China to be part of a very special experience: not only to present our own
6 performances, but to experience those of local and international fellow artists, at
various stages of and maturity in their career; to get to know them through art and
9 in our shared daily life; to create connections with them; to exchange ideas and
knowledge; to get to know the new and unfamiliar places we travelled to; and finally,
0 to bring a slice of our multifaceted Singapore to China and a slice of China and the
1 world back to our beloved home.

Daniela Beltrani



On performance art, festivals and Art Now Live Tour
Text & images by Daniela Beltrani

Despite the persistent and widespread lack of consensus over a definition of performance art that could encapsulate its myriad of manifestations - when somebody, unfamiliar with performance art, asks me to explain it in layperson's terms, I often resort to using a series of words, which are keys to unlocking my personal access to it from my own artistic practice and recognising it in many others: self, authenticity and sublimation.

The self is essentially in stark opposition to the reductive body of the artist in the body art^[1] expression, favoured in the 1970s and 1980s and to this day by certain performance art historians such as the American Amelia Jones and the Italian Lea Vergine.^[2]

Body is certainly the most visible and tangible aspect of the artist, but - considered alone - carries a too limiting biological and mechanical connotation and, in my opinion, needs to be enriched by the overall human intangible essence.^[3]

The *Taittiriya Upanishad*, within the yogic science and the millenarian tradition of the Vedas, offers a multifaceted and more comprehensive concept of self, as unfolding in five layers (*panca kosa*): *annamaya* (physical), *pranamaya* (life force), *manomaya* (mental), *vijnanamaya* (intellectual) and *anandamaya* (bliss). Human beings are thought to naturally operate at all such levels in every aspect of their life.

As such, during a live performance, it is easy to experience and acknowledge that it is not just the artist's physical body involved, but also his energetic, mental, intellectual and soulful aspects. As these are unable to be captured, reproduced or represented via traditional methods of documentation of performance art (photography and video) due to their intangible essence, it is easy to become more concerned and ensnared by mere preoccupations of the body.

This also explains why some authors (e.g. Amelia Jones) find it possible and in some cases, even preferable, to access performance art through its documentation,^[4] something which I personally, both as an artist and as a theoretician, consider an aberration. Artistic experience should not be confused with its study.

Thus, authenticity is understood and appreciated as an essential quality in performance art, within the vast context of the self in artistic mode, and furthermore is essentially what distinguishes performance art from traditional theatre, where the actor enters a role, wearing the etymological persona. In performance art, the artist is essentially himself in all his fallible and imperfect humanity, yet capable of greatness. Sublimation occurs when thoughts, ideas, directions, actions, experiences from life are distilled into and inform the artistic experience. In my opinion, the connection between art and life is potentially much stronger in performance art than in any other contemporary art discipline.

As such, performance art can happen in any place and at any time and it is most

1 Nowadays the expression refers to art made on or with the human body, principally body piercing and tattoos.

2 Please refer to Tracey Warr and Amelia Jones, *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000) and Lea Vergine, *Body Art and Performance. The Body as Language* (Milano: Skira Editore, 2007).

3 Andrea Pagnes offers an interesting enriched concept of body, sourced from the Arab culture, as body-body (Gesem), mind-body (Gesed) and psyche-body (Beden) in Andrea Pagnes, *The Fall of Faust* (Florence: VestAndPage press, 2010), 130.

4 Amelia Jones, "Presence' in absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 4, Winter 1997, 11-18.

definitely not relegated to specifically designed spaces, such as theatres, museums, galleries or other traditionally artistic contexts.

Unlike visual art exhibitions, performance art festivals - almost always organised by practising performance artists - constitute the most suitable and comprehensive artistic and social platforms for artists and audience to come together to share and exchange life and art in a relaxed and open setting. It is also a way for the artists to confront themselves, not just with new audiences, appreciative of and focused on performance art, but au pair with other professionals, both emerging and established. Performance art is never practised in the studio and it is never rehearsed. It needs an audience to be called such. The trilogy of artist, audience and artwork is reconciled in the definition of the very essence of performance art.

Furthermore, additional activities often enrich the programme of performance festivals, such as symposia, seminars, workshops, artistic visits, cultural experiences and the like.

The presence of all the participants (and the audience) during the festival – lasting typically from a few days to an entire month – allows a meaningful social and artistic exchange incomparable to that of an opening of a visual art exhibition. Art and life are thus shared and exchanged in equal parts. The connections created can become fertile grounds for further networks and events, which in turn could open up to newer platforms and networks in a naturally reproductive cycle. More importantly, one becomes part of a sort of brotherhood that extends beyond national borders and opens up to further growth and discourse.

And again unlike a typical visual art exhibition, the invitations to performance art events and/or to collaborate predominantly prove to be the direct result of a previous direct encounter and exchange, where the co-presence of the subjects was the essential prerequisite. Thus, research is not only done on paper or online, but also on direct experience, substantiating a more enriching and meaningful base. The organiser tends to be not a professional curator, but a practitioner who creates art, who consumes it and who offers it to audiences too. This allows a comprehensive understanding of all the practical and theoretical implications in organising a performance art event.

Such festivals can be one-offs^[5] or become regular features that highlight the country's annual calendar. In Southeast and East Asia, the most notable performance art events are Future of Imagination (Lee Wen and Jason Lim) and Fetter Field (Jeremy Hiah) in Singapore; Asiatopia (Chumpon Apisuk) in Thailand; Beyond Pressure (Moe Satt) in Myanmar; undisclosed territory (Melati Suryodarmo) in Indonesia; in:act (Nhasan Studio) in Vietnam; N.I.P.A.F. (Seiji Shimoda) in Japan; P.I.P.A.F. (Yuan Mor'o Ocampo) and T.A.M.A. (Tupada) in the Philippines; OPEN (Chen Jin) in China.

In most parts of Asia, these festivals take place with the support of local or foreign funds, when available, of other artists or they are self-funded. The artist, who chooses performance art as his main mode of artistic expression, does so because it is a sort of call and certainly not for financial gain. Very often, not only is the artist not remunerated for his efforts, but also, he has to bear various costs directly, from those concerning transport and accommodation to those in relation to the materials

5 I have myself organized una tantum performance art events in Phnom Penh (*blurred*) and Singapore (Making Space, Body as Woman), besides the more regular monthly meetings of S.P.A.M. (Self Performance Art Meetings) in Singapore during 2011 and 2012.



Myself and organiser Chen Jin at the inauguration of the 15th OPEN international performance art festival



Sophia Natasha, myself and Ezzam at one of the entrances to 798 Art District Beijing



Sophia Natasha, our friend and performance/installation artist Cheng Guang Feng, myself and Ezzam during the last day of OPEN



Ezzam, Sophia Natasha and myself during the first dinner of OPEN

necessary to the realisation of his performance. Performance art, much the same as other contemporary art practices, requires preparation, training,^[6] discipline, study, discussion, critique, to be continually relevant and alive. And it furthermore requires platforms, continuously, regularly, relentlessly: without them, there is no performance art.

It is the effort of artists such as Cai Qing, the organiser of Art Live Now Tour 2014, and many others, which allows the practice to continue in the most fertile setting of exchange and confrontation, particularly at transnational levels.

And thanks to the support of Singapore International Foundation and National Arts Council, Ezzam Rahman, Sophia Natasha Wei and myself were able not only to fly to and spend nine meaningful days in China, but also to chart the entire experience in this catalogue.

Art Now Live Tour 2014 started under the auspices of a most notable Chinese performance art festival, OPEN, which in 2014 reached its 15th edition and uninterrupted since 1999 continues thanks to the invaluable and persisting efforts of organiser and performance artist Chen Jin.

OPEN unfolded comfortably over three afternoons, between 12 and 14 September, and it offered a programme of performances by international and local artists at The Tree gallery, 798 Art District in Beijing. Curious crowds unfamiliar with performance art gathered regularly and added to the already extended audience of the festival. New friendships were formed and old ones came together again.

The evenings were relaxed and reserved only to generous libations and consumption of delicious local food in the company of all the artists.

Cai Qing also took us to visit performance and installation artist Cai Wei's studio, just a short drive from 798.

Sadly the time in Beijing was limited, as – upon the end of OPEN on Sunday

14 September – the following day we embarked on a ten-hour bus journey to Linzhou, near Anyang, in the province of Henan, south of Beijing. The journey turned out to be not merely a means to an end, but

6 Since 2011 I have attended many performance art workshops in Singapore and abroad, conducted by pluriannually experienced performance artists such as Jason Lim, Sinéad O'Donnell, VestAndPage, Melati Suryodarmo, Marilyn Arsem.

an endurance test in patience and self-control, quite appropriate for a performance art context, though the result was a little disappointing.

During the trip, Cai Qing informed us that the Art Now Live Tour was the 13th item of a multi-faceted cultural festival taking place in various locations in and around Linzhou. Our hotel was in a beautiful position overlooking the city, near the road to the Grand Taihang Canyon and by the Red Flag Canal. The hygienic conditions of the accommodation were below acceptable standards, but Ezzam, Natasha and myself were in high spirits. The food was always in generous amounts, great variety and tremendously delicious.

The weather caught us all unprepared in Linzhou after the mild climate of Beijing. Therefore an impromptu climb up the hill under fine yet relentless rain on the soft and stony ground at the behest of our hosts proved a huge challenge, which we took with positive energy but tired us and abated our spirits. However, this also made all the artists bond closer and support one another. A delicious dinner and a restful sleep completed the recovery process.

For a couple of days after our arrival, we experienced Linzhou and its surroundings, which turned out to be of immense historical importance. Yinxu, one of the ancient capitals during 12 kings of the Shang dynasty and UNESCO World Heritage site, was the major place of discovery of oracle bones and bone script, prodromal to the current Chinese ideograms writing. We also visited the majestic Museum of Chinese Characters in Anyang, which collects and exhibits many artefacts. It was an impressive discovery for the international artists as well as the local Chinese.

The immersive experience into our new location allowed us to connect with



A tomb at the archaeological site of Yinxu

its history and hidden depths beyond the often disheartening, current outlook of myriads of grey buildings under construction or in disrepair. The discovery was a pleasant surprise, which some took as inspiration for their performances.

One evening we were entertained by a local businessman, who is supportive of the arts in the region and who sponsored our programme. This made a meaningful change to our usual dinner at the hotel, interspersed with showcases from Chinese opera performers and impromptu singing which many artists took to after enjoying a few cans of Tsingtao beer.

The last two days were reserved for the performances,



Sophia Natasha, performance art researcher Tong Pui Yin, myself and Ezzam during the last dinner of OPEN



Myself, Sophia Natasha and Ezzam with two of the local artists during a dinner



From the left: Cai Qing, Ezzam, Johannes Ranalletta, Valerian Maly and Klara Schilliger, Alastair MacLennan, myself, Sophia Natasha, Cai Wei, Gilivanka Kedzior and Barbara Friedman



Dinner with showcases

which ended up taking place between the diverse settings of Linzhou Cultural Centre and the Taihang Mountains.

Free time in the morning allowed us to prepare for the afternoon showcase. This was an important part of the preparation for a performance: the time to rest and become still before the demanding time of the performance, regardless of the duration.

One of the foreign artists, Japanese Sakiko Yamaoka, had asked Cai Qing to carry out her performance at Linzhou bus station. She managed to get the local populace interested in interacting with her and it proved an opportunity for the other artists to share smiles and snacks, whilst in attendance. Whilst at the Linzhou Cultural Centre, I took the opportunity to share some of our previous catalogues with the library there. Despite lacking a section in English, the librarian accepted the donations graciously.



Ezzam and Sophia Natasha taking on the impromptu stage

One of the last performances of the very last day in Linzhou, *One tree is called xxx* by Zhuang Lidan, gave us a marvellous opportunity to explore a section of the Taihang Grand Canyon, with some frightful walks, but spectacular views.



Interacting with the locals during Sakiko Yamaoka's performance at Linzhou bus station



Ezzam and Sophia Natasha on the Step Cloud Stairs walk at the Peach Flower Valley



One of the librarians at the Linzhou First Grade Library



Goodbyes outside the bus before the long journey back to Beijing: Ezzam, Sophia Natasha and myself with Hou Guang Fei



On 20 September, we were back on the road to Beijing, but this time the journey surprisingly took 13 hours, three hours longer than before. We arrived near the 798 hotel of a week prior, just in time for a quick bite and a restful sleep before our early departure back home the following day.

Overall, the trip had been a fruitful experience from both the human and artistic experience viewpoints. Ezzam, Sophia Natasha and I came back to Singapore, not only richer, but amongst ourselves stronger and more connected.



Ezzam, myself and Sophia Natasha on SQ805 on our way back home

A moment of reflection on Chinese soil
Text & images by Ezzam Rahman

Once we reached Linzhou and settled in the hotel after the long bus journey from Beijing, all the artists were told that we were going to visit a local elementary school in the countryside the following day. The first thing that came into my mind was what to wear. Of course, I am not a vain nor a narcissistic individual, but I was worried whether I would have enough fresh clean clothes, since I had soaked my only pair of jeans the day before due to heavy rain.

My outfit that day consisted of a pair of baggy cotton harem pants, an oversized black t-shirt (as usual) and a pair of Feiyue black school shoes to match my top. I was actually excited about the visit. I love children, which also explains why I am a teacher.

The journey from our hotel to the school took a good 20-minute drive. From the window of our moving mini-bus I started to notice grey rain clouds had gathered. It was not a smooth drive to enter the little village: we passed several plantations and by then, it started raining and the bus had to avoid the slippery, yet rocky parts of the road. We passed by houses upon houses and by the time we reached the entrance of the school, the rain had gotten heavier. I have to say that, all the artists were unprepared for bad weather, but I, being the over-prepared person I am, I actually had brought with me a portable poncho that I had bought from H&M for SG\$12.

The organisers did thankfully distribute thin disposable ponchos to all the artists. There we were, all in bright yellow and baby blue disposable plastic ponchos, welcomed in a small room of an enclave of rural buildings. Young children all nicely dressed with red scarves tied around their necks for the occasion were at one side of the room. There were a few speeches done by the mayor and other important local Chinese, but sadly I could not understand anything, because I do not speak the language. Soon after, the teacher stepped in front of the children and, like a little maestro, she led the children to sing a song. I smiled watching the children sing: in earnest I have a great respect towards the teacher who imparts knowledge to these children in such a harsh, bare and basic environment.



Young students performing



Myself with a young student

After the children had ended their song, they gave each artist a bunch of flowers and a red piece of paper that contained the lyrics of the song they had just presented. Then, we were told that the villagers were going to be our guides to the next location. So, there I was outside the school, in my poncho about to light a cigarette, when I was informed to walk fast up a steep pavement. It was actually a nice walk, even though the rain had gotten really heavy by then. I passed some houses and had

a chance to see the local's simple living conditions. After the distractions from the architecture, I was welcomed by nature, my nemesis. There I was at the foot of the hill, looking upwards and witnessing a trail of people already walking halfway, whilst I was still nowhere near the summit.

"You must be kidding, right?" I mumbled to myself. "Why are we doing this again? Where is the curator? I want to have a word with him. Isn't this supposed to be a local school visit and why am I climbing up this hill?" I was having an internal conversation with myself. I could not remember the last time I was so close to nature, worse still, a walk up a hill!



Daniela, myself and Sophia Natasha at the summit



The surrounding landscape seen from the summit

The rain was harsh and my shoes were not helping, but I was thankful for my foresight of not wearing my Jeremy Scott Adidas winged shoes or else they would have been covered in orange soil. The trail was long and

painful for me: I was listening to my own breath and panting really hard. I was very careful not to step on unstable rocks, as the ground was muddy and all I could smell was fresh leaves, the pungent soil and the rain. As much as I wanted to take little breaks in between, I told myself I had to keep going. I was cursing and swearing all the way up to the summit, wanting to know what was so important up this hill that we, the artists, had to experience and why the locals wanted us to see it so badly.

As I walked on, I completely ignored the people around me. I had to concentrate on my own balance and, with my fingers crossed, not to twist my ankles or knees. Each time I thought I was about to lose my balance, I tried to stay close to a nearby bush or lowered my body closer to the ground, so as to lessen the impact. I tried to remember what I had learnt from outdoor camps I used to attend back in high school. The air got thinner and it was harder for me to breathe. The rain had drenched my whole body and I just wanted to get over and done with this trail.

Finally, I reached the summit and I have to admit that I was one of the last few to do so. Most of the artists were as unhappy as I was, because we were completely unprepared for such an activity. The locals were sharing with us the alleged stone carvings on some rocks, but by then I had lost interest and I was standing far away from the crowd, trying my best to breathe normally. It was unfortunate that I could not see the magical view up this hill, because it was still raining quite heavily.



Selfie at the summit

Eventually I caught up with my peers, congratulated them and we hugged one another for having managed to complete the walk, but in less than ten minutes of having reached the summit, we were told that we had to return back to the school.

It was much harder to walk down the hill, as the trail



The locals helping me descend



The state of my shoes after returning from the summit

we were on had become muddier and it was really dangerous. My mind was giving me images of freak accidents and crazy scenarios; it was really hard to concentrate and watch every step. I was really nervous, but I told myself to calm down.

Halfway down, I reflected: I was not the fittest amongst the people around me, but I started appreciating what my body was capable of doing. Also, I started appreciating the surroundings: the wet trees, the rocks, the mud and even the smell of rain. I managed to pace myself to observe the locals walking down the hill at ease. Not a speck of mud had stained their shoes, whereas for me, half of my harem pants were already painted with mud and I could not even see my ankles.

There were times that I got stuck in the soil, as if I was sinking in quick sand and a few elderly men had to pull me out. Their hands were as rough as sandpaper indicating the years of experience and hard work they had done. Most of these men had been here almost all their life. Nature is their source of survival and

there I was, like a spoilt brat complaining how difficult life was back home.

Finally, I reached the foot of the hill, where I began about two hours before. In such a short time, I had learnt so much about the environment, the simple happy people who live there and what I was capable of. I listened to what my body had to say, to slow down, to re-learn how to find balance, to breathe and to take care of my own body.

Although I still have no idea why we had to climb the hill just to look at some alleged man-made carvings on some rocks, I actually enjoyed the walk in retrospect. I had rediscovered issues I had neglected and avoided for the past 33 years, that is to live happily and enjoy every moment while I am still breathing.

I thanked and hugged the elderly men who had helped me descend and when I looked at my shoes all covered in creamy mud, I told myself it was okay, they are just shoes, and walked on.



It's red, then green
Text & images by Sophia Natasha Wei



Beijing, 798 Art District

Very contrasting was for us the experience in Beijing, 798 Art District and Linzhou, Anyang, Henan province, which were the places where the Art Now Live Tour 2014 took us to from 12 to 21 September this year. Art Now Live Tour was also the 13th item of the China Linzhou Friendship and Peace Festival. Memory often betrays us, so I will try my best to remember it the way I encountered it. And perhaps too, there was something we brought along with us from the city to the rural that made the contrast visibly felt.

Heralding the start of the Art Now Live Tour 2014, we were invited to perform at The 15th OPEN international performance art festival, which took place at the Tree Gallery from Friday 12 to Sunday 14 September 2014. The organiser of the festival was Chen Jin. There we converged with other international performance artists, including Alastair MacLennan (Ireland), Al Paldrok and Taje Tross of Non Grata (Estonia), Gilivanka Kedzior and Barbara Friedman of Red Bind (France), and several Chinese performance artists from emerging to more renowned ones. The space was small and studio-like. We were told that the gallery opposite had hosted OPEN international performance art festival the year before. The audience was made up of mainly artists, fans of artists and passers-by. In an interesting way, the small space of the Tree Gallery made the interaction with the audience expectedly intimate.



The 15th OPEN international performance art festival poster at the Tree Gallery

Over the weekend, performances took place either inside or outside of the gallery with the exception of Alastair MacLennan, whose piece was presented at the now defunct train station nearby. As there were many artists involved, the line-up was busy and intense with about 11 artists per day between 2pm to 6pm and performances by international artists were interspersed with performances by the local Chinese. Most of the performances at the Tree Gallery I had observed were self-contained





Lean Bean, Alastair MacLennan



Audience at the Tree Gallery



New Ten Commandments by Non Grata (Al Paldrok and Taje Tross)



Knacker's Ball by Red Bind (Giiivanka Kedzior and Barbara Friedman)

and conservative. The artists had conveniently used the given space as physical stage, paying little attention to the context of the space. As someone new to Chinese performance art, the pieces, which I experienced, were



Inviting my mother to make art together by Wang Dan Dan and her mother



Village near Linzhou, Henan Province

brash and impulsive, but nonetheless possessed very strong visual language. I wonder whether there was actually a desire to keep this festival as safe and small-scale as possible, as justified by how OPEN has "shifted towards organizing low-key, small-scale events after its climatic tenth anniversary in 2009"^[1] At this point, it is also worthy to note that "performance art has played a significant role in Chinese art practice since

the late 1970s ... at the center of production in the creation of a range of new visual structures,"^[2] and so often performance art in China was the equation of performance art + artist with audience + undercover police kind of scenario, back in those days. Putting myself in the shoes of the spectator, the weekend of the OPEN must have

1 <http://leapleap.com/2013/07/to-speak-of-chinese-performance-art-at-a-crossroads-easier-said-than-done/>, accessed 28 October 2014.

2 Thomas J. Berghuis, *Performance Art in China* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8 Limited, 2006), p.37.





National Museum of Chinese Written Language, Anyang



Rates Stares by Alastair MacLennan and his cabbages at the Linzhou Cultural Centre

been a brilliant showcase of performance art with pieces which spoke of one's acute responses to the man-made environment, and how art spoke to them in the urban landscape. And so, I had gained valuable insights into China contemporary art and learnt more about their quest for freedom represented by the collective artistic voice. Much was also heard through the organiser of Art Now Live Tour 2014, Cai Qing, about the 1990s Beijing East Village and how the then avant-garde contemporary artists populated that place and the recent events organised by them. It was a pity that it was not one of the venues for Art Now Live Tour.

The red imagery of Beijing that I had collected as a viewer, participant, artist and tourist was the amalgamation of these performance pieces: red loudhailer used in *New Ten Commandments* by Non Grata; red paint in *Fuck You* by Cai Wei; red ink stained cloth by Peng Xiang; red roses used by Han Bing; red threads in *Inviting my mother to make art together* by Wang Dan Dan and her mother.

For sure, the experience in Beijing had shaped our sensibility as performance artists. Being in the mountainous region of Anyang was a return to nature and bred more opportunities for authenticity of performance to take place. It was as though the elements converged for our imagination to run wild. Before the performance festival took place in Linzhou, Anyang, Henan Province, we had two days of cultural immersion in the land. On the first day, we climbed an anonymous hill after visiting the village school in the rain and cold, and in the most ill-prepared conditions, as part of the invitation of foreign artists to the International Symposium on Heshan rock paintings in Linzhou.

During the hike, the local Chinese appeared to possess a strength to fight for something more than what life beholds. Not only were they physically fit, the beautiful thing was how they embraced their simple untainted lives. The climb up the hill brought personal reflection to me like a journey into the soul. We also had the chance to visit the Taihang Mountains, where the Red Flag Canal, also known as the "Man-made Heavenly River", was. The abundance of history and culture continued to woo us in the city of Anyang, where Jiaguwen (oracle bone script) was discovered, and we had



Return by Liu Xiao



Un'altra cultura è possibile (Another culture is possible) by Fausto Terenzio Grossi

the pleasure of visiting the National Museum of Chinese Written Language. In a place with no wi-fi connection, little human presence and cold rainy days likened to those of winter, we felt small and vulnerable in the huge universe of China. Yet we continued to keep our spirits up and kept looking forward to perform in the following two days. In retrospect, the cultural immersion was important to prepare us for the performances. As we crossed from Beijing to Anyang, the definition of performance art also changed in the process. The performance pieces in Linzhou by both the international and Chinese artists were raw, spontaneous, subversive and for some, clever materials were chosen. Very much a contrast to the experience in Beijing. Most of the pieces represented a decent sense of authenticity and engagement with the context of the place. I fondly recalled the pieces, which reminisced nature and the goodness it brings.

In Linzhou, images of the performances were essentially green to me. *Return* by Liu Xiao, where he set a pigeon free into the woods; *Un'altra cultura è possibile (Another culture is possible)* by Fausto Terenzio Grossi, who was roaming in a space which he had demarcated using tapes on trees; *Rates Stares* by Alastair MacLennan and his cabbages at the Linzhou Cultural Centre; the use of one of the four elements – water, in the dripping calligraphy ink in *Shi Jian (Time)* by Daniela Beltrani and the Zen meditation performed before the Peach Blossom Pool at the Grand Taihang Canyon, in *One tree is called xxx* by Zhuang Lidan. The environment tamed the animal in us, and we sought peace through the artistic language.

So, we visited these two places and they were big lessons for our artistic practice. The exchange was indeed a live exchange of culture, sentiments and lives. If we are ever going to be in China again, I hope we find new vistas to embark on, open up to more possibilities and see what more we could create, reinvent and share going forward.



Grand Taihang Mountains

Programme of performances in Beijing

ART NOW LIVE TOUR 2014, International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang
12 – 21 September 2014

The 15th OPEN international performance art festival
Tree Gallery, 798 Art District, Beijing, China, 12 – 14 September 2014

Friday 12 September 2014

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. Fausto Terenzio Grossi | <i>Zi You (Freedom)</i> |
| 2. Non Grata | <i>New Ten Commandments</i> |
| 3. Physical Guerillas | <i>Untitled</i> |
| 4. Liu Xiao (Sean) | <i>Chun Xia Qiu Dong (Four seasons)</i> |
| 5. Xu NaNa | <i>Untitled</i> |
| 6. Sakiko Yamaoka | <i>Blind game</i> |

Saturday 13 September 2014

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Alastair MacLennan | <i>Lean Bean</i> |
| 2. Cai Qing & Johannes Ranalletta | <i>Fu Zi Chu Xing (father and son on an expedition)</i> |
| 3. Red Bind | <i>Knacker's ball</i> |
| 4. Ezzam Rahman | <i>Terracotrahman</i> |
| 5. Sophia Natasha Wei | <i>Vague Bloom 2</i> |
| 6. Niña Yhared | <i>Transhumance Skin</i> |
| 7. Cai Wei | <i>Fuck</i> |
| 8. Daniela Beltrani | <i>Sewn II</i> |
| 9. Peng Xiang | <i>Chong Sheng (Reborn)</i> |
| 10. Pu yun | <i>Wei Zhi (Position)</i> |
| 11. Yeh Tzu Chi | <i>Xi Niu (Rhino)</i> |

Sunday 14 September 2014

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Zhang Xian Min | <i>Yi Min Ying Xiang, Jing Xiang (Migrating Shadows, Reflection)</i> |
| 2. Sakiko Yamaoka | <i>Geometrical Trip</i> |
| 3. Klara Schilliger & Valerian Maly | <i>secret service (whispered)</i> |
| 4. Wang Dan Dan | <i>Yao Qing Ma Ma Yi Qi Zuo Yi Shu (Inviting my mother to make art together)</i> |
| 5. Fausto Terenzio Grossi | <i>Die on the stage</i> |
| 6. Wang Hua | <i>Namecards</i> |
| 7. Johannes Ranalletta | <i>Gan Bei (Bottoms up)</i> |
| 8. Hu Yi Fei | <i>Untitled</i> |
| 9. Han Bing | <i>Fen Si De Fu Dan (A fan's burden)</i> |



Sewn II

Text by Daniela Beltrani

Images by Sophia Natasha Wei, unless otherwise stated

13 September 2014

The 15th OPEN international performance art festival
Tree Gallery, 798 Art District, Beijing, China



Sewn I (2014), Future Of Imagination 9, Singapore. Photo credit: Watan Wuma.



Sewn I was a performance created especially for Singapore's most notable performance art event, Future Of Imagination 9, held in Little India between 3 and 7 September

2014. It was simultaneously conceived as part of the I'M-MORTAL series,^[1] which I initiated in 2013.

Following the durational (six and two hours, respectively) *Waiting for you* (2013) and *Anonymous Words* (2013 & 2014), *Sewn* is a performance, which creates a privileged space where performer and audience meet and connect on a one-to-one basis through simultaneous presence and reciprocal uninterrupted vision.

I was originally inspired by my daily morning meditation sessions with my ten-year-old son Luca, where we sit on two cushions in front of one another, in lotus posture, occasionally connecting through our hands, but more often keeping our hands in *chin mudrā*,^[2] our eyes closed.

In the performance *Sewn I*, first I offered the sitter choice of colour amongst a selection of sewing threads and then I sewed the chosen thread between our pieces of clothing. With the thread connecting us we initiated a silent relationship, which ended when I offered the sitter a pair of scissors with which they got to cut the thread and free themselves from the space. I remained there in *padmāsana*,^[3] alone until the next person decided to sit with me and with the severed colourful threads hanging from my black t-shirt as residues from the previous encounters, and secured with small knots.

The engagement with the audience is thus two-fold: at one level it is a one-to-one connection for the sitter and I and, at another, it is a traditionally witnessing visual experience, for the rest. The layers of visions are consequentially two-fold too: the sitter and I look exclusively at one another; the surrounding audience looks at us, individually and as an exclusive unit. As a unit, the sitter and I are completely

1 The two main underpinnings of the I'M-MORTAL series are creating the possibility of an intense physical/emotional engagement with the audience and the use of a form of communication that transcends language, culture and other forms of division and therefore appeals to humanity. As such, the series does not propound or favour a particular theme; rather it is the form of the performance that shapes the series. Real-life experiences I have contribute to build the fabric of the series and fill the thematic gap in a contextual manner.

2 A basic yogic gesture of the hands, where the thumb and forefinger are joined at chakra points forming a circle, whilst the remaining three fingers are extended side by side.

3 More commonly known as lotus posture, it is a sitting position where the legs are crossed with feet exposed on top of the thighs; it is traditionally used in yoga and in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist meditative practices.





oblivious to the surrounding space: I invite the audience to be part of an artistic experience where we are both protagonists as our individual selves and as transcended selves.

The sacred space where we sit becomes the imaginary canvas where our engagement takes place and the colourful threads, left on my black t-shirt after the sitter severs it, become traces of our encounter.

I later realised that this visual experience of inclusion/exclusion created in some the desire to partake with me in the same space.

The gallery space I chose for the performance was much like that of a shop window: it allowed the audience to watch behind the glass as if in the act of window shopping, yet not to spend any money, but consuming the performance gratis.

The reasons for bringing *Sewn I* to China were essentially identified in my personal need to connect with an audience beyond cultural and linguistic irreconcilable differences and the presentation of an alternative way of making performance which surpasses a sensationalistic format involving violence and nudity, often strategies used in the past by Chinese performance artists.

As such, the short 45-minute performance *Sewn II* managed to bring to the local and international audience an element of calm as it blended harmoniously with more differently intense performances during the day. The feedback after my performance came eloquently in English and from the non-English speaking Chinese silently with smiles and gestural requests of photos to be taken together with the individual sitter. I had a total of six sitters over 45 minutes, mostly strangers; but the last two - fellow performance artist Ezzam Rahman and the son of the Art Live Now Tour curator Cai Qing, Johannes Ranalletta - surprised me by deciding to sit together. For me it was a completely different experience from the previous ones, because I had to alternate my field of vision between the two of them and I experienced the feeling of coming together and abandonment, as I would alternately turn my focus from one to the other.

In contemporary urban societies across the globe, where news travels fast via social media and the Internet in general and engagements are carried out on virtual planes, *Sewn* aims to bring both sitters on one side and the viewers on the other to a more humane pace and to offer them a level of engagement more meaningful and equal. Beyond our egos, through art I firmly believe in the egalitarian possibility that we can recover the spirit of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*^[4] and feel the connection even with complete strangers, whilst catching in them a glimpse of that divine spark which is within ourselves and therefore in each and every human being, without any sort of distinction.

The very reflection of my own self in the eyes of the sitter, during *Sewn II*,^[5] was an intense personal experience, which I hope the other was able to feel, as we were showered by plenty of natural light coming from the window on one side and reflected by the opposite white-washed wall of the gallery.



⁴ *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* is a Sanskrit expression from the *Maha Upanishad*, VI-72, translated as "the entire world is one family."

⁵ This experience did not occur in *Sewn I*, as it was performed in the evening with the aid of the yellow artificial light from the street lamps.

Terracotrahman

Text by Ezzam Rahman

Images by Daniela Beltrani

13 September 2014

The 15th OPEN international performance art festival
Tree Gallery, 798 Art District, Beijing, China



Terracotrahman was inspired by the terracotta warrior sculptures in Lintong, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province.

Since this was my first performance in China, I wanted to present a work that was related to the country's culture, history or tradition. I grew up seeing images of the terracotta warriors in travel documentaries, books and art history lessons. The history behind these sculptures resonated in my mind.

I had prepared 33 black and white paper masks, before I arrived in Beijing and had a few ideas on how I wanted to interact with the local audience. Upon arrival to the performance site at the Tree Gallery at the 798 Art District, the eager onlookers of the festival overwhelmed me.

The artists were given all the freedom to perform in any place. It was a huge challenge for me, as for I wanted to interact with the local audience but, alas, I do not speak their language.

I wanted to perform in a room where there was natural lighting. As I started performing I respectfully invited one member of the audience at a time, placing the paper mask over their heads and positioned them randomly, quiet and still until I finished all 33 masks. Then, I wore a mask and stood still in front of the crowd.

Why 33? - It is the number of my age.

Why the same facial expression on the mask? I wanted something that is as uniform as my reference to the terracotta warriors.

I managed to catch the audience's attention and make them part of my work and this was the largest amount of audience participation I had ever experienced. I wanted to contain all the audience in one room doing the same action, which was the simple act of standing still.

I dedicated this work to my late father, Abdul Rahman, hence the title *Terracotrahman* in honour of him.

Vague Bloom 2

Text by Sophia Natasha Wei

Images by Ezzam Rahman

13 September 2014

The 15th OPEN international performance art festival
Tree Gallery, 798 Art District, Beijing, China



“Whatever you are seeking won’t come in the form you are expecting.”

Haruki Murakami

Performance art is an intentional dream. One does it, because one wants to and one wants it to do something for others. This time in Art Now Live Tour 2014, I see that the performance pieces beckoned to humanity to mend whatever was broken.

Art Now Live Art Tour 2014 was to me an extension of Future of Imagination 9, as I had previously performed *Vague Bloom 1*.

Jennie Klein, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Art History, in her critique of *Vague Bloom 1* wrote that “No longer mute object, as was the case with Gauguin’s Tahitian women and Van Gogh’s Japanese-print inspired paintings, Wei reclaims the Orientalized spirituality of Van Gogh and Gauguin for herself.”^[1]

In my recent performances, I have sought to make performance like a painting, deliberately blurring the boundaries between the two art forms. I create images that subvert the definition of beauty and use natural materials of feminine character, such as flowers, ice and soil. Underlying these performances is my deep desire to represent human struggle in its naked form, often specifically the struggle of being a woman.

In a continuation of such struggle, in *Vague Bloom 2*, I used my body as a walking sculpture, and portrayed the struggle of black roses growing in the contrasting bed of white represented by the slit-open cloth and falling cotton wool from the pillow, similar to the form of a vagina. Coincidentally, the image of the roses complemented the space with the words Tree Gallery on the wall at the front of gallery. My performance began with my transformation into a walking sculpture, wearing the pillow over my head and having the black roses as the contrasting colour representing the struggle to grow and

1 Jennie Klein, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1444291332478528/>, accessed 6 November 2014.

flourish. I ended my performance with an act of resignation, lying down and defeated by my own struggle.

My reference artist is Ana Mendieta, Cuban-American performance artist and wife of minimalist sculptor Carl Andre, at the time of her death. I am attracted to how the female body debunks a utilitarian purpose and achieves distortion through the artist's manipulation.

I quote below Rebecca Weeks (U.K.) from the Venice International Performance Art Week 2012.

The corporeal endurance of the female body to achieve empathy is expressed through my visual language, so much that the body is integral to the completion of the artistic visions I have. Perhaps it is vague now, but I hope to have more visceral experiences with my audience as the next few pieces bloom into something more refined.

per-for-mance art [pə'fɔ:məns a:t]
noun

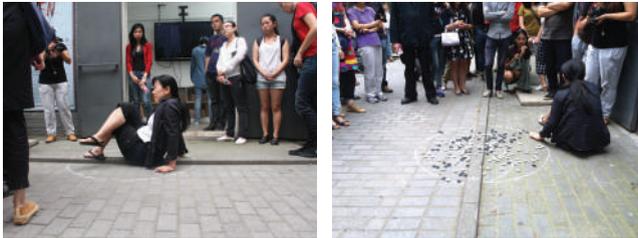
1. allowing for vulnerability, being present and achieving empathy.
2. achieving a transformative potential within works through taking risks.
3. *Performance artists* are like alchemists turning dirt and tears into gold.

Rebecca Weeks, UK

VENICE INTERNATIONAL
**PERFORMANCE
ART WEEK**
08 - 10.11.2011

Sakiko Yamaoka's *Blind game*
Text & images by Daniela Beltrani

12 September 2014
The 15th OPEN international performance art festival
Tree Gallery, 798 Art District, Beijing, China



I clearly remember the beginning of Sakiko's performance. Her decision to start it inconspicuously, without a formal announcement by the organiser Cai Qing, contrasted undoubtedly

with the location she had chosen: right in front of the entrance to the Tree Gallery, an obviously high-traffic area. People kept on entering and exiting the gallery, passing by Sakiko, ignoring her without the knowledge that she was beginning a performance. In the midst of this situation, another performer, from the previous showcase by Physical Guerrillas, a local experimental theatre collective, seemed completely oblivious of Sakiko's preparatory actions. He seemed to enjoy the attention to an action he had carried out during the last minutes of the collaborative performance: with a bare torso, erect like a soldier and with all the pride and self-importance of a performative moment, he walked past Sakiko and went onto installing himself in a space where the public could admire him wearing a red banner placed diagonally from one shoulder to the opposite side's hip. I remember asking Sakiko whether she wanted me to do something about it, but she declined politely. "This too shall pass," the adage echoed in my mind.

Finally, her persistent and focused presence together with her repetitive actions insinuated her in the busy space and people started to pay attention.

Dressed in white top, black trousers and black shirt, Sakiko had sat on the raised delimiting bricks between the public footpath and the area immediately before the entrance to the gallery. With a white chalk, Sakiko had drawn a circle on the ground all around her and divided the circle with a sinuous line, the result calling to mind an incomplete *Yin/Yang* symbol. She then proceeded to empty the contents of a box onto the circle. Many special coins fell: one side completely black, the other white with three raised black letters clearly visible: YES.

Sakiko sat again on the ground and, at times closing her eyes, at others looking away from the circle, she proceeded to feel the coins with the purpose of turning all the YES ones upwards. This became clear pretty early on in the performance and created a sense of expectation in her purposeful actions mixed with excitement at her regular movement all around the circle to make sure she would not miss any of the coins and turn them all up. Her actions seemed to be guided by an invisible and extremely patient eye followed by a diligent and loyal hand. Many times she turned around the circle, without rushing, but in calm waves, despite the clearly uncomfortable position.

Towards the end though, once she had made sure all the blacks had been turned to



YES, she then proceeded to turn three or four back to black.

The reason for this conscious decision was three-fold: first and foremost, the artist considered a uniformity of this type dangerous and uncomfortable. Secondly, the *Yin/Yang* symbol clearly necessitated the duality of opposites. Thirdly was the artist's reaction and critique to her compatriot Yoko Ono's piece *Ceiling Painting*, originally created for John Dunbar's Indica Gallery in 1966. There, Yoko Ono had placed a ladder under a section of the gallery's ceiling, where she had placed a canvas with a hanging magnifying glass. Upon picking up this object, one was able to read the small word on the canvas: YES.

This performance resonated in me, because it spoke to me about the human experience our immortal souls come to live the moment we are conceived. Despite our divine essence, life as humans is essentially tragic whilst, we oscillate between opposites. Negation of one of the horn of the dilemma is never a viable solution, because life is characterised by an intrinsic duality. Acceptance of this essence will help us transcend the duality for a third position, which in turn will free us from suffering.

Sakiko usually performs this piece over two hours, but for OPEN, given the great amount of artists in the daily programme, she decided to shorten it to around 30 minutes.

Prior to the one in China in 2014, Sakiko had already taken *Blind game* to Taiwan in 2009 (twice), Japan in 2010, Spain in 2011 and the Netherlands in 2012.



Liu Xiao's *Four seasons*
Text by Ezzam Rahman
Image by Daniela Beltrani

12 September 2014
The 15th OPEN international performance art festival
Tree Gallery, 798 Art District, Beijing, China



Liu Xiao had dimmed the lights in the gallery space, laid four bags of soil with a growing plant in each of them, freshly bought from a nursery near the performance site. He also placed four large torch lights on the floor with huge and heavy art catalogues underneath it to act as a support and to elevate the projection, shining onto each plant, creating a forest of shadows against the white wall. I have to say, I actually liked the simple installation and I was waiting

to see what actions Liu Xiao was going to make or how he was going to manipulate the chosen materials in his performance.

Liu Xiao entered the space, dressed in blue denim jeans, a blue blazer with shirt, smart leather shoes, a pair of gardener's gloves and a pair of scissors. He then slowly started to trim the first plant, grooming it like a professional hairdresser until all the leaves were cut. He then proceeded to the second bag, but instead of cutting the leaves from the plant, he plucked each leaf until all the leaves were gone, leaving a skeleton of branches and twigs sticking out from the black bag of soil.

By then I had lost interest in his repetitive actions and decided to exit the gallery for a quick cigarette. I entered the gallery again to see what else he had done. Liu Xiao had lost his shirt and blazer exposing his stocky and sweaty body. He was digging some soil from the fourth bag and used it to write some Chinese characters on the gallery's wall. After asking some people around to translate the words he had written, I finally found out that the words were the four seasons - autumn, winter, spring and summer. After the writings on the wall, he bowed and exited the space.

He titled the performance piece *Four seasons* and I have to admit that it was quite a literal and mediocre approach on how to depict the four changing seasons by destroying four perfectly growing plants. Maybe I had higher expectations towards this piece, because I was welcomed with a simple and interesting installation of materials. But I find it problematic when it becomes clear that an artist has not thought through his ideas or has not put enough preparation in selecting his materials for a performance.

When I questioned the artist about the significance of using the art catalogues in the presentation, he replied that there was no connection between the huge books and his works. Alas, they were used just to elevate his torch lights. I remember telling myself then that it was his way of working and I just had to learn to accept it.

Han Bing's *A fan's burden*
Text & images by Sophia Natasha Wei

14 September 2014
The 15th OPEN international performance art festival
Tree Gallery, 798 Art District, Beijing, China



This was a ritualistic performance of lyrical realism by Han Bing, Beijing-based multidisciplinary artist. He first entered the space with his body painted with white emulsion and white

vermicelli stuck at his back. The bodily structure reminded me of a satyr. In the pristine setting, there were model sculptures on the ground, some geometric ones used for still-life drawings – a sphere, a cube and a pyramid and the small bust of Roman philosopher Lucius Anneus Seneca the Younger. Contrasting with the latter, there was a larger bust of Michelangelo's *David*, which emanated an uncanny aura. Han started to interact with the bust by observing it from a distance and drawing strokes in the air, following the contours of *David's* facial expression. Soon, he started embracing the statue, caressing and kissing it in an uncomfortable ecstasy. The stage of white changed as he soon was covered in black calligraphy ink, foreshadowing the arrival of something violent. It sure was.

One of the statues broke and the geometrical shapes were in a mess. He soon lifted up the bust with only one hand, the burden symbolised by the weight of it with a gradual loss of vigour and he went into a trance before the entire image collapsed. The performance was a blend of fantasy and reality, situated in a liminal zone between realism and fable, before it slowly mutated into something else.

The artistic language worked on both levels: the symbolism of colour, shock and battle against modernism, and the conflict between the body and Western modernization.





Programme of performances in Linzhou

ART NOW LIVE TOUR, International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang 2014
12 – 21 September 2014

Linzhou, Anyang, Henan Province, China, 18 – 19 September 2014

Thursday 18 September 2014

Linzhou Cultural Centre

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Huang Yan | <i>Ding Wei, Ce Shi – Xiang Alastair Zhi Jing
(Position, measurement: Tribute to Alastair)</i> |
| 2. Alastair MacLennan | <i>Rates Stares</i> |
| 3. Red Bind | <i>Goodbye Chen Die Yi</i> |
| 4. Hei Gui | <i>Yi Sheng Er, Er Sheng San, San Sheng Wan Wu
(One brings two, two brings three, three brings multiples)</i> |
| 5. Fausto Terenzio Grossi | <i>Un'altra cultura è possibile (Another culture is possible)</i> |
| 6. Pu Yun | <i>Ding Wei (Reinforcing position)</i> |
| 7. Daniela Beltrani | <i>Shi Jian (Time)</i> |
| 8. Hou Guanfei | <i>Face.book</i> |
| 9. Ezzam Rahman | <i>Yan (Smoke)</i> |
| 10. Pan Jia Nan | <i>Wu Jie (No reason)</i> |
| 11. Sakiko Yamaoka | <i>Daily revenge</i> |
- Sakiko performed at Linzhou bus station



Friday 19 September 2014

Parking lot of the road to the Grand Taihang Canyon

- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Sakiko Yamaoka | <i>Fake snakes are still on our real (labour) walks</i> |
| 2. Liu Xiao | <i>Hui Gui (Return)</i> |
| 3. Red Bind | <i>Red Flag (Hong Qi)</i> |
| 4. Sophia Natasha Wei | <i>Qin Mi (Intimacy)</i> |
| 5. Yeh TzuChi | <i>Ta De Gu Shi (Her Story)</i> |
| 6. Peng Xiang | <i>Shou Qu Dai Wu (Waiting for something)</i> |
| 7. Zhuang Lidan | <i>Yi Ke Shu De Ming Zi Jiao XXX
(One tree is called xxx)</i> |
| | Zhuang Lidan performed before the Peach Blossom Pool at the Grand Taihang Canyon |
| 8. Alastair MacLennan | <i>Cane Bane</i> |
| | Alastair performed at the Zither rock of the Peach Blossom Pool at the Grand Taihang Canyon |
| 9. Fausto Terenzio Grossi | <i>Fausto, non essere ridicolo (Fausto, don't be ridiculous)</i> |



Shi Jian (Time)

Text by Daniela Beltrani

Images by Sophia Natasha Wei

18 September 2014

ART NOW LIVE TOUR

International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang 2014

Linzhou Wen Hua Guan (Linzhou Cultural Centre)



Shi Jian was originally inspired by a spontaneous action I did during the S.P.A.M. group performance at Future Of Imagination 9, on 5 September 2014.

As I held the ubiquitous (in Singapore) *Good Morning* kitchen towel, completely soaked with water, above my head, I became aware of how differently the drops would fall onto my face: fast and abundantly to begin with, as if they were an *impromptu* cascade, and then,

after a while, slowly, irregularly and scarcely.

After the group performance had ended, I felt as if the action could be explored further, particularly in connection with the fluid and multi-faceted concept of time. As I re-imagined the action from the perspective of a unitary performance, I was further inspired to enrich it with an additional element contextual to the Chinese setting: black Chinese ink. I saw myself writing on the towel the ideogram translated as time and allowing it to disappear under my eyes and those of the audience, at different speeds, until it would almost drip-dry.

I was easily able to source the essential materials (kitchen towel, brush and Chinese ink) in Singapore and remained open to obtain the remainder (glass vase and water) directly in China. A friend taught me how to place in correct sequence the strokes until the ideogram would become clear for all to read and understand. And I imagined that whilst the audience grasped the intelligible meaning itself in the unmistakable signs, they could also specularly appreciate it in an empirical manner during its dissolution and eventual disappearance.

Cai Qing, the organiser, allowed all the artists ample choice of locations. Yet I felt that for mine a disused dome-shape area, made of cement, glass and metal, at the Linzhou Cultural Centre was the perfect raw space I needed for a performance that I envisaged as quiet and meditative and that I hoped it would gently prompt the audience into a contemplative state.

From my hotel room in Linzhou, I borrowed a cheap looking glass vase and I filled up a large empty plastic bottle with water.

A couple of days prior to my performance I practised the strokes over and over, until I felt confident that they were etched in my memory. I also became vaguely familiar with my material, that is, not to the point of full control over it, but enough to be acquainted with its essential behaviour.

A short digression is at this point indispensable. In my performance art practice, never



do I talk about nor do I employ the term rehearsal: any performance is an opportunity for me to equally share and learn about the surrounding world and myself. There is no predetermined benchmark or standard I feel compelled to comply with. Concepts of failure and success are equivalent paths of discovery, capable of potentially generating meaningful aesthetic experiences in minds and souls, which are either open or susceptible to be unlocked. As such, there is no draft or rehearsal, only good copy and full exposure. My whole self and my aesthetic sensibility are exposed and tested each time I perform. Examining the material and having a generic knowledge of it prior to the performance serve the generic purpose of not having to face unnecessary surprises due to mere ignorance and of being professional in the preparation of the performance itself.



Furthermore – after the disparaged experience of a both extensive and intensive practice since my very beginnings in performance art in 2011 – I have realised I not only favour an overall clean and essential image, devoid of unnecessary or distracting elements, but I also pay extreme attention to colours and shapes. This forma mentis of mine does not affect in any way the spontaneity and the authenticity of the performance, but merely constitutes the most fertile ground for it.

Whilst I can appreciate the beauty of impromptu performances -and I myself have been invited to present them – I also firmly believe in still keeping a close eye on the aesthetic aspect. Continuing practice can definitely assist in this respect.

Under the metal and glass dome, dusty sand covered the ground. I was dressed in my customary cotton black gypsy skirt, strappy top and cotton wushu shoes. As I prepared for the performance, I serendipitously found a grey brick that could serve me both as writing surface and platform I could stand on. Behind me a cement stage. I placed the brick in front of it. On it I laid down the towel, the brush and the small dark ceramic bowl filled with ink. The unpleasant smell of the ink was befitting to the dirty and disused space. The glass vase full of water was in front of the brick, towards the audience that was slowly gathering in the space. I closed my eyes, took a few deep breaths. I opened my eyes and began the performance by picking up the brush and holding it vertically, as instructed. I slowly started the sequence of strokes that would eventually make up the ideogram *Shi Jian, time*.

Once I completed it, I picked up the towel, stepped onto the brick that – to my surprise - under my weight became unstable. I stood there for a few seconds, holding the towel vertically high in front of me, so that my face became concealed. I slowly turned to my right and proceeded to complete a slow 360° rotation, whilst playing with the unsteadiness of the brick suffering noisily under my weight. Once I returned to the initial position, I bent over and let the towel be completely submerged in the water. As I looked at the process of dissolution of the excess of ink into the liquid, a sense of calm beauty fell upon me. I hoped the audience could see what I was seeing. I lingered. I then slowly moved upwards holding the towel in front of me.

The ideogram had become a blur of vertical lines, whilst





water was dripping heavily from the bottom. I stood there for what my arms felt like a very long time, but perhaps it was no more than 20 minutes. I could clearly see the drops gathering from the edges of the towel to the middle section and fall at a progressively yet irregularly slower pace. I decided not to see the drops any longer, but to feel them on my face. I closed my eyes and raised my arms directly above my head. I experienced temporary relief for my arms as I changed their position. I stood there and sensed the dripping getting sparser and sparser after increasingly extended intervals. At one point I felt the performance was complete, like a circle. I lowered the arms, stepped down from the brick and in *namaskāra mudrā* I thanked my audience.



The feedback after my performance was something unexpected: several members of the audience came up to me and complimented me with words, smiles or tears. I was gladly overwhelmed and naturally I have an even more pleasant memory of the performance than just my own personal impression. A senior artist advised me to continue this performance in other platforms, by trying different combinations of writing materials. I am not sure whether I will do it, but I guess, if the situation is appropriate, I might definitely consider it. The performance is now part of my past practice and my current repertoire.

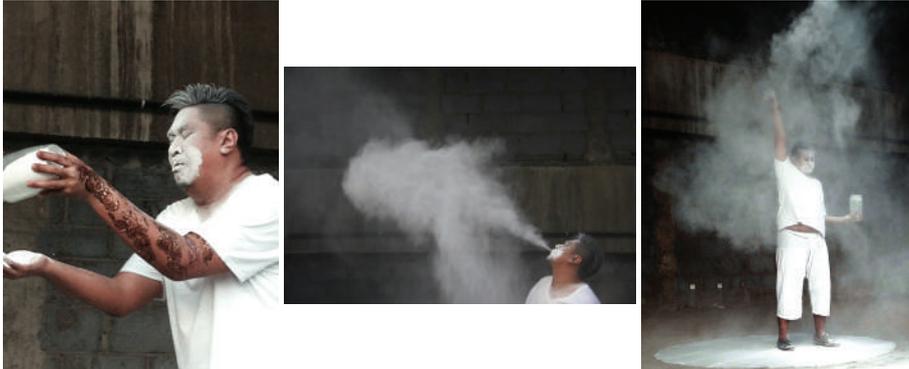


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Yan (Smoke)
Text by Ezzam Rahman
Images by Daniela Beltrani

18 September 2014
ART NOW LIVE TOUR
International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang 2014
Linzhou Wen Hua Guan (Linzhou Cultural Centre)



Yan (Smoke) was inspired by the time I had experienced in the Linzhou. The autumn weather in China was fantastic to me: I can stand the cool air, but I cannot stand the heat. I have always appreciated countries with four seasons and to be given the chance to travel and present a performance piece in China was definitely a huge bonus to me.

During my stay in Linzhou, I had experienced the harsh thunderstorms, heavy rain and cooling air. I got to see thick fog up the Grand Taihang Canyon, where our bus driver had to carefully drive the artists up and down the hill.

Yan was definitely inspired by the cooling Linzhou's weather. I started the performance by walking in circles around a round piece of white plastic. As I walked, I hit my chest creating a heartbeat that echoed in the domed space. I walked in a gradual rhythm from slow to fast and back to slow and stopped in the middle of the round plastic sheets.

Using one simple material, talcum powder, I poured a handful of it in my mouth and slowly blowing it to create clouds of powder fog. I repeated the action several times and at a few occasions the dry powder choked me in my mouth.

I ended the performance by throwing the rest of the powder in the air. The sweet scent from the powder lingered in the air and the smoke died and disappeared as it settled slowly onto the ground.

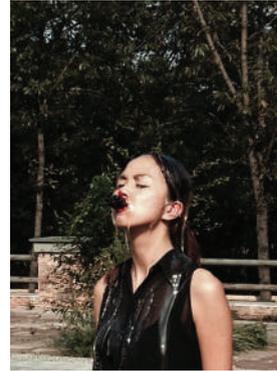
Qin Mi (Intimacy)
Text by Sophia Natasha Wei
Images by Daniela Beltrani

19 September 2014
ART NOW LIVE TOUR

International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang 2014
Parking lot of the road to the Grand Taihang Canyon



In Linzhou, Henan Province, I presented a piece titled *Qin Mi*, whose phonetics sound like intimacy in Chinese. I used this to express something feminine and the choice of materials included honey and a bunch of sweet grapes grown in the region of the Taihang Mountains. The act of placing the grapes in my mouth was the act of kissing. The performance began with me pouring honey



over my body, which added a layer of transparency to my body and offered a strong visual of honey slowly trickling down the fabric of my shirt. The colour red from the Chinese ink stamp on my lips looked like that of a woman wearing a lipstick and kissing the fruit and brought the work to a deeper level of sensuality. That intimacy was further stretched and symbolised by myself enclosed in the space of a structure at the midpoint of the parking lot, just before the road to the Taihang Mountains.



The end of the performance was a drastic change of visual image represented by black colour on my face and gold on my lips, which together symbolised the disappointment and/or resignation of what intimacy often brings to the female body.

My performances are laden with thoughts and symbolism and not always accessible, hence more often than not, the difficulty of writing about them.



What I wish from my audience is that they take parts of the performances and make meanings of these visuals for themselves. Through my work, I hope they could relate in real time, the struggle, complexity and convolutions of being behind it. I look forward with hope to more exciting visuals of struggle.

"The expression is free, so is the body." Anonymous

Zhuang Lidan's *One tree is called xxx*
Text & images by Daniela Beltrani

19 September 2014
ART NOW LIVE TOUR
International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang 2014
Peach Blossom Pool at the Grand Taihang Canyon, Anyang



On the very last day, after Peng Xiang's performance by the Red Flag Canal, we boarded the bus again. The next artist, Zhuang Lidan, had chosen a completely different location for her performance and so we went on a 45-minute ascending journey across the mountains of the Grand Taihang Canyon. After exiting a long tunnel, it felt as if we had stepped in an awe-inspiring and different time and space from those inhabited immediately before. The landscape was imposing

and impressive and during the journey, some of the local artists recalled how there had been performances with long scrolls of gigantic calligraphy being unrolled from the top of a mountain for several metres down. No more we were in a flat landscape of eerie and abandoned buildings and urban despair, but on a full immersion in nature.

Zhuang had chosen the famous Peach Blossom Pool for her performance. As we arrived, the artist was already prepared to start. I immediately noticed she had undergone a complete transformation from the woman I have been sharing meals and bus rides with. We could not communicate, except for a few words in English or Chinese, occasionally. Yet I had noticed this quiet woman, mostly dressed in careless and casual clothes, well-mannered, demure and decorous in striking contrast with her local male counterparts, who were often excessively vociferous, and insensitive in their social demeanour.

Zhuang welcomed us in a short dress, the sandy colour of the surrounding stones; her long black hair down; no adornment; a pair of simple maroon moccasins at her feet.



She laid down two scrolls of calligraphy and proceeded to secure them on the irregular ground with large transparent tape. Upon closer inspection, both

scrolls were difficult to look at, because of the double vision effect caused by the fact that each character and drawing had a doppelganger immediately and slightly slanted below to it. The ideograms were not the simplified Chinese ones as we might have expected, but were more similar to those we had admired on the oracle bones



exhibited at the National Museum of Chinese Written Language, in Anyang, a few days earlier. Despite Claire (local volunteer)'s

translation in English, I recall neither the meaning nor the intention of the scrolls, and this was probably due to the fact that I was too impressed and transported by what happened next.

Zhuang explained that she had chosen the Peach Blossom Pool as her space and inspiration for her performance. She then invited us all to feel like trees and assume any pose that would make us relate to them. As I practice Patanjali's *ashtanga yoga* of which meditation is but one of the practices, I immediately welcomed the invite in such a conducive environment and I naturally took the yogic *Vrkasana* (tree pose). Inhaling oxygen from the cool and clean air and exhaling the warm carbon dioxide in a specularly opposite process that occurs in the trees, I felt connected not only to the natural setting but to all the people around me. After the initial excitement, my mind became calm and stillness was as much inside me as outside.

The sense of void I perceived was wholly positive and seemed to be a door into infinity both as a separate individual and as an individual connected to those around me. For me, taking part in Zhuang's performance was an experience, alas short, but undoubtedly unforgettable. A reconciliation with the human race beyond artificial differences. Art that is used to access our spiritual doors, something that I have been recently exploring with my own performances. I simply loved the way Zhuang had responded to the space in a simple and direct manner, creating the opportunity for an art that truly used no material, but the overwhelming richness of who we deeply are. After the void had slowly morphed into fullness and sense of contentment, I decided to stop, look for the other artists and see how everybody else had responded to the artist's invitation.

Zhuang was standing still, with her eyes closed and her arms above her head in a circle, her elbows slightly bent and her middle fingers touching. As her spot, she had chosen a roundish and flat stone emerging from the pool. I immediately understood why the dress was short, as she must have planned to reach the stone by walking into the shallow waters. I took photos of my fellow artists and saw them in disparaged positions, from sitting to standing to using the arms upwards to being barefooted. It was a beautiful sight to behold.

There is nothing more to add, other than being there was everything and irreplaceable by any image or video. Such is life, such is performance art.





Red Bind's *Goodbye Chen Die Yi*
 Text by Ezzam Rahman
 Images by Daniela Beltrani

18 September 2014
 ART NOW LIVE TOUR
 International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang 2014
 Linzhou Wen Hua Guan (Linzhou Cultural Centre)

Red Bind's *Hong Qi (Red Flag)*
 Text by Ezzam Rahman
 Images by Daniela Beltrani

19 September 2014
 ART NOW LIVE TOUR
 International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang 2014
 Parking lot of the road to the Grand Taihang Canyon



Red Bind is a dynamic duo, composed of Gilivanka Kedzior and Barbara Friedman, from France. One should not underestimate their quiet personal demeanour and appearance: these feisty petit artists have been travelling and performing all around Europe and this is their debut performance in Asia. The curator invited them and they had self-funded this trip to present their new works.

In Anyang, the artists had decided to present two performances: one at the Linzhou Culture Centre and the second at the parking lot of the road to the Grand Taihang Canyon.

For the first performance, the artists were garbed in black closely to their inner wear. Gilivanka and Barbara had meticulously selected simple daily found materials to use for their performance titled *Goodbye Chen Die Yi*, which in the earlier part of the day they had told me that it was in reference to the late Leslie Cheung's effeminate Chinese opera singer character in the famous movie *Farewell My Concubine*, directed by the prolific director Chen Kaige. We then continued discussing on how much we love foreign films and so we exchanged movie titles.

The artists laid a piece of flattened cardboard box on the mid-steps of the cultural centre facing the road, where there was a building on the opposite side, with a huge



sickle and hammer symbol, which is the well-known Communist logo. They later re-entered the space with a pair of red plastic basins, half filled with water. Hidden in their right palms, there was a round cake of hotel soap. They slowly kneeled on the cardboard box, placed their hands and soap in the water and started to create bubbles. This action reminded me of how the local Chinese women do their



household cleaning.

They then rubbed the soap vigorously onto their faces for a few minutes and stopped intermittently to catch their breath. White thick liquid soap covered their faces only leaving holes of air through their mouths and nostrils. They then dipped their heads in the basins and the washing actions continued for the next 20 to 25 minutes. The connotations of this action hit me: the ideas of political brainwashing, the peeling of tired fake smiles and how the locals had to live under false pretences.

There were many unexpected moments when Gilivanka started to sneeze due to the painful rubbings and Barbara struggled to open her eyes. The mixture of saliva, phlegm, tears, water and thick soap surfaced to the top of the basin. It was a painful process to watch for the audience and I imagined how painful it must have been for the artists to present this piece. They then in agreement, ended their performance by exiting the space, carrying their basins.

The short and simple performance the pair presented at the parking lot of the road to the Grand Taihang was entitled *Red Flag*. I watched the artists perform through the viewfinder of the digital camera which they passed to me to help document their performance. Dressed in black t-shirts and tights, Gilivanka and Barbara entered the space carrying a silver basin each, filled with thick red paint.

They placed the basins on the ground, dipped their hands and stood upright with their arms raised up in the air in a surrender position. After a few minutes, they kneeled on the ground and then laid face down, but at changing positions, their hands were constantly upright.

I managed to capture the red paint slowly dripping down their arms, in my wild imagination, as if they were some murderers who were caught red-handed by the authorities or two women who were trying to help an animal after it had been knocked by a car.

There is something special about Gilivanka and Barbara: as a duo, they really complement one another. They both have strong presence and share a great chemistry. There is a beautiful balance between them. Neither one of them was trying to outshine the other. In these performances, they always compromised with one another and the space. There was a deep quiet melancholic and poetic beauty in the works they presented. I think my interpretation does not justify their ideas: one just has to experience their performances directly to feel my words about them.

Peng Xiang's *Waiting for something to happen*
Text & image by Sophia Natasha Wei

19 September 2014
ART NOW LIVE TOUR

International Performance art tour from Beijing to Anyang 2014
Red Flag Canal by the road to the Grand Taihang Canyon, Anyang



Upon arriving at the performance site, the audience was at the far end of the Red Flag Canal and they were literally expecting something to happen, as the title suggested. The artist stood in the river and waited. At some point, he ate the leaves and plants that came as though he was the predator and preying. This piece was site-specific and engaged new meanings of the Chinese idiom *shou zhu dai tu* changing it to *shou qu dai wu*. With the play of puns, the original idiom meant waiting for one's prey and the altered meaning meant waiting for something to happen at the canal.

After speaking with the artist, I learnt that this work was about the individual grappling with social inequalities, increasing materialism and consumerism, and a lack of human touch in the modernizing China. It left an impression in me because majority of the audience was expecting something to happen, something to move towards them following the water currents. They were not near him when he performed, but they were having conversations about the canal, the water, and in general, the environment around them.

To me it was a beautiful sight, the audience interacting with the performance at a metaphysical level. And such a scenario could actually happen without anyone being physically near the artist.

I like how Dr. Virginia B. Spivey puts it, "[Performance art] often forces us to think about issues in a way that can be disturbing and uncomfortable, but it can also make us laugh by calling attention to the absurdities in life and the idiosyncrasies of human behaviour."¹

In sum, it is the responsibility of an artist to strive towards an ideal more perfect than a utopia.

May we continue to take on that innovative spirit and take risks as we perform to be more and better.

1 Virginia B. Spivey, <http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/performance-art-an-introduction.html>, accessed 28 October 2014.



DANIELA BELTRANI

(Photo credit: Matthew Johnson)

Daniela Beltrani (b. 1968, Rome, Italy) is a professional independent curator and performance artist based in Singapore.

Classically educated in Italy, Daniela attained her Master of Arts in Contemporary Asian Art Histories in 2011 from LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore.

Since 2010 Daniela has curated solo and group exhibitions and written articles for art publications and catalogues with a focus on contemporary art in Southeast Asia and performance art.

Past exhibitions curated by Daniela include *Trappole* (2010), *Gnothi Seauton* (2011), *Upaya*, solo show of Jason Lim (2011), *Deadlocked*, solo show of Joel Yuen (2011), *Reliquarivm* (2012), *Face2Face*, solo show of Rofi (2012), *Bukit Musings* (2013) and *Tempus Fugit* (2014), solo shows of Jason Lim, and *a-edge* (2014).

Early in 2011, sensing an all-too-often misleading gap between art theory and art practice, she embarked on an experiential journey in performance art to supplement her concurrent research, and she has not stopped since.

Since 2011 she has also organized performance art events, in Singapore and abroad, for local and international artists.

In June 2011, she set up S.P.A.M., a performance art platform.

She has presented over 50 performances, solo and in collaboration, in the Philippines, Singapore, Italy, Cambodia, Myanmar, Turkey, Indonesia, Finland and China.

Daniela is not only a practising performance artist and organiser of performance art events, but she has also contributed essays and articles on the discipline.

She tries to stay focused on her intent to promote an experience of art that on one side is non-elitist and yet probing and on the other can offer opportunities for alternative and more visceral readings and reflections. Benefitting from a strong humanistic background, ultimately her efforts tend to encourage the audience of her performances into a more holistic experience of art as a means to cultivate their own individual aesthetic sense and to recover their humanity beyond the flimsy parameters of a decadent and commodity-driven society.

Her holistic approach to performance art - as performer, spectator, amateur photographer and academician - allows her to fully explore the practice and its different aspects.

<http://danielabeltrani.weebly.com>



EZZAM RAHMAN

(Photo credit: Sophia Natasha Wei)

Ezzam Rahman (b. 1981, Singapore) is a multi-disciplinary artist based in Singapore. Ezzam sees himself as a serious clown, a free spirited informer, a filial infant and a multi-tasking creator. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Fine Arts from University of Huddersfield and was formally trained as a sculptor from LASALLE SIA College of the Arts.

Ezzam has participated, initiated, organized and co-curated numerous local and international group exhibitions, events and festivals. He has presented his works in Australia, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Macau, Malaysia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand and U.K.

Ezzam is most comfortable with installation art and performance art. His works vary from the choice of medium, concepts and strategies of presentation. He favours narratives due to the ability to convey his ideas, to inform, as well as to tease the audience. Ezzam also uses unconventional materials, such as found objects and his own bodily wastes to further his frequent research on impermanence, value and worth. He curated the Roving Artists, performance art segment for The Substation as part of the annual Night Festival from 2010 - 2013 and was also the co-director for Fetter Field Performance Art Event in 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2012.

Ezzam had curated an exhibition for the Stockholm Pride 2012 in Sweden at the Kulturhuset, where he presented ten queer related artworks from Singapore.

One of his experimental short film is part of a traveling showcase titled Human Frames, by French video art distributor Lowave.

His most recent series of miniature artist's skin sculptures were commissioned by the Singapore Art Museum and showcased in an exhibition entitled *Unearthed*. Ezzam is currently a part-time lecturer at LaSalle College of the Arts.



SOPHIA NATASHA WEI

(Photo credit: Daniela Beltrani)

Sophia Natasha Wei (b. 1982, Singapore) is a performance artist based in Singapore. For eight years, Sophia Natasha Wei has relentlessly pursued performance art as her expression. Her performances address the human condition, which she hopes her audience could re-create personal meanings from. The corporeal endurance of the female body to achieve empathy is expressed through her visual language. She works regularly with confines of space, distorted beauty and vignettes of dreamlike fantasy. In recent years, her works have evolved to present the liminal zone between painterly images and live action. Having represented Singapore both internationally and locally and contributed actively to the local art scene, she aspires to integrate her artistic practice and teaching career with her lyrical imagination and creativity.

<http://iamsophianatasha.weebly.com/>



