



QUE ER

Edited by David J. Getsy

Documents of Contemporary Art

mechanism 24 hours a day, wherever you are. Now you have access to these most private and intimate scenarios while on the street, in a café and so forth. [...]

Kholeif [W]e have spoken before about the invasion of politics into these personal spheres. In this sense, with the continued focus on art within North Africa and the Middle East, do you ever feel that your work is being instrumentalized as a political tool?

Khaled This has always been a challenge since I started working professionally. I have struggled against this idea when different curators try to put you in specific zones. However, now I see this challenge as part of the job. As an artist, one is constantly producing different meanings. Part of the job is then to struggle with how this meaning is put into the world and how people perceive it. When I started working, I did not perceive my work as political. I attempted to theme it differently and I always attempted to park politics to one side. With time, I have nevertheless realized that everything is a political act. Whether I am producing a video or an abstract painting, these are all political gestures. Every artwork has its own set of self-referential political contexts. As artists, I believe our responsibility is to be aware of the context in which we are producing and the attachments that are associated with the meaning we produce. This awareness is crucial: both in the contexts of the history in which we are producing and the present in which we are exhibiting. [...]

Mahmoud Khaled and Omar Kholeif, extracts from 'The Non-Located Space: In Conversation with Omar Kholeif', *Ibraaz Platform 004* (November 2012) 1-5, 5-6.

Yan Xing

In Conversation with Travis Jeppesen//2011

In 2010, Yan Xing made an explosive impact on the Beijing art scene with his performance work DADDY. Yan stood facing a white wall, delivering a very personal monologue on the absence of a father figure in his life – and the role that void played in his maturation – as well as the wrenching forms of abuse he suffered while growing up. In a culture in which the airing of one's private grievances and struggles in public is frowned upon, Yan's piece effectively registered a new approach in the artistic index.

In his latest exhibition, Yan presented another performance-based work, Realism,

which featured himself and seven actors reciting and discussing quotes from André Breton's Surrealist Manifesto while pondering a replica of Michelangelo's David, as well as *They Are Not Here*, a filmed experiment in which Yan placed seven men in a cramped hotel room for a single afternoon and refused to allow them to communicate with each other throughout the duration.

As one of China's few openly gay artists, Yan Xing – his work, and arguably his very presence which is so often tied up with it – continues to ruffle feathers in a country where cultural norms are only slowly being broken down.

Travis Jeppesen Your educational background is in oil painting. What made you decide to switch to performance?

Yan Xing First of all, the medium itself is very important for me. The medium has its own logic and system, which does not happen by accident. What I really want to stress here is that I have never been away from or given up painting – even while indulging in performance. In addition, I never avoid classical art; to some extent, the fear of art makes me feel that what I am doing is far from what I expect. However, maybe this is not art at all, just experiences. China's art education follows the Soviet Union's approach; therefore, students have to choose their department according to the medium when they enter university. Ultimately, graduating from the oil painting department in the art academy has nothing to do with my art practice, as I am neither a good student nor a good example.

Jeppesen Can you talk about your performance installation at Galerie Urs Meile?

Yan This is my first solo exhibition, which features two projects. One is a work I finished last year, *They Are Not Here*, and the other one is called *REALISM*. *REALISM* is actually not a work about the performance, or about the sculpture, video, print and installation. In the scenario that I constructed, there is a huge sculpture, which reflects my internal desire. On the opening day, seven actors and myself did a two hour-long performance. The whole practice – including operations, descriptions, rehearsals, occupations, negotiations, handwriting – could be defined as the plea or defence for an 'imagined reality'. I want to spark a thorough discussion about the generation of mechanisms of art history. This attitude reflects my persistent sincerity towards 'the creation of a reality without any difference', or, better, my insane stubbornness aimed at 'the full accomplishment of the unavoidable mistake'.

Jeppesen Perhaps your best-known work to date is the *DADDY* project. Can you tell me about that?

Yan This is a performance that I dedicate to my DADDY. I spent more than one hour facing a wall talking about my special personal experiences. When I look back at this piece afterwards, it at least demonstrated that I am a good narrator. Narration bears endless charms.

Jeppesen You are a founding member of the artist group COMPANY. What is the history of this group? What have been its aims and projects? How does this project differ from your solo works?

Yan COMPANY is a continuous project. It is not an organization, nor a team. Since last year, we have done four projects. As I wrote in the statement in 2008:

COMPANY is a company without an employer, employees, or salaries. The concept of COMPANY is as vague as its infrastructure. COMPANY has no set principles or precise characteristics. The artists of COMPANY rarely communicate with each other. They work independently with no prescribed aims or obligations towards any goal. COMPANY was named and founded with this intent collectively by the founding artist members.

COMPANY does not accept new members, it does not encourage communication between members, or interfere with members' decisions. COMPANY is a project in progress and can change course at any time. COMPANY is just COMPANY. It does not aim at producing a brand or becoming a style. Everything in the world is named after something that already exists; however, COMPANY does not want to be defined this way, even though one day it inevitably will be. For this reason, the members declined to define COMPANY. It has already been stated that COMPANY is a company. It is not an art group or an organization, but possibly could be. Please trust COMPANY. Words are the only way to preserve the evolution of humanity. What has been stated here is not actually everything COMPANY believes in.

Jeppesen You have a blog in China that has been very controversial. Would you consider blogging to be an important part of your art practice? What role does blogging play for you as an artist?

Yan The reason why it is controversial is because I have never linked up my art creation with blogging. If this is simply an artist's blog, I don't think it would be attractive. Maybe also because I often express my thoughts, via the blog, about politics, history, and the media, which is very different from topics other gay people are concerned with, such as fashion and lifestyle. Plus, my extravagant wording and accounting, the 'fancy' life I live, this attracts even more people's eyeballs. Though this is just my daily life. However, I believe this all will be

gone finally, as blogging no way bears anything serious and deep. I never expected the output from blogging would deliver deeper values. The relationship between blogging and me and my art practice is similar to the one between my life and art. All the web tools, including my Weibo [the Chinese version of Twitter], are all becoming an individual medium that can quickly be consumed. I believe all the time that I am not a good example. Therefore, I never investigate why I am controversial.

Yan Xing and Travis Jeppesen, 'Interview with Travis Jeppesen', *Whitehot Magazine*, 2011. (<http://whitehotmagazine.com>)

Prem Sahib

To Make Queer Art Now//2014

I see my artistic engagement with queer culture as one that is inextricably bound to the biographical content of my work. I don't feel like I necessarily take on 'queer culture' as a subject matter, but I do use my own experience of sexuality as a material and, in doing so, it becomes implicit.

There was an urgent political backdrop to the queer art that was being made during the late 1980s and early 90s when queer theory and activism emerged; namely, the AIDS epidemic. I don't think that these issues have disappeared but, within the UK at least, they have been transformed and queer politics are being addressed with a louder voice outside of art. My generation obviously has a very different relationship to HIV/AIDS than the generation before us. I remember discussing this with a friend who lost 80 percent of those close to him during the 1980s. We were talking about the different types of visual representation associated with HIV for both our generations; whereas he had a very stark physical memory of those around him being ill, my association was perhaps more remote. I recently made the sculpture *Two Dots* (2013), which mimics the positive result of a rapid HIV test. The two dots figure my relationship towards HIV as both a very real worry but also somewhat abstract. My experience of AIDS isn't the experience of those in the 1980s and the current global complexity of this issue leads to its abstraction.

I don't think that the use of queer aesthetic forms necessarily secures any political capacity. In fact, declaring something 'political' can sometimes be problematic in the sense that you are inadvertently defining the parameters for