

Jean-Marc Decrop

Jérôme Sans

# CHINA

THE NEW GENERATION

SKIRA

# YAN XING

A performance artist, Yan Xing (b. 1986) is a highly original figure on the Chinese scene with a growing international reputation. His work combines installation, photography, video, and performance to present fictional narratives involving high camp, cross-dressing, melodrama, and sincerity.

With obsessive perfectionism, Yan seeks complete control over the setting and the presentation of his installations, rigidly guiding the spectator in terms of what he wants to show and leaving no room for audience participation. For an exhibition he draws up a list of 300 points to be checked in order to ensure that everything is in line with his meticulous idea of perfection: from the color of the walls and the size of the pedestals, to the number and positioning of the video monitors, the framing of the photographs, and the background music. As a result of this attention to every detail, the exhibition space as a whole becomes a work of art, a reflection of the artist's own universe.

This very personal world is rich in references and accumulations, as Yan Xing practices appropriation and draws particularly from the vocabularies of artists like Auguste Rodin, Constantin Brancusi, Aristide Maillol, Edward Hopper, and Robert

Mapplethorpe, whose works he adopts and adapts.

So he creates pseudo-Rodins by using the artist's style and techniques, and turns a well-known female nude by Maillol into a particularly virile male nude. Sex, the body, and the nude are key elements in his work, where seduction, desire and homoeroticism create a specific atmosphere. The installation-performance shown at the Venice Biennale on the third floor of the Palazzo Contarini Polignac within the framework of the Pinchuk Foundation's extramural exhibition *Future Generation* was a video filmed live in a bedroom with a naked male model writhing in a bed with just a white sheet. Less provocative, his black and white photographs of men of a scholarly, elegant, and retro appearance are imbued with a captivating atmosphere.

The numerous awards recently won by Yan Xing include the Chinese Contemporary Art Award (CCAA) for 'Best Young Artist' in 2012 and the 'Future Generation Art Prize' of the Kiev-based Pinchuk Foundation, as well as the prizes of the Martell Art Fund and the 'Focus on Talents Project' of the Today Art Museum in Beijing.

Jean-Marc Decrop

*Two Videos, Three Photographs, Several Related Masterpieces, and American Art, 2013*

Photo No. 4

Photography (b/w), ultra giclée, 50 x 40 cm (print), 58 x 48 cm (framed); Edition of 7 + 2 AP; 120 x 96 cm (print), 132 x 108 cm (framed); Edition of 5 + 1 AP; 170 x 136 cm (print), 186 x 152 cm (framed); Edition of 3 + 1 AP





# PASS ON

INTERVIEW WITH YAN XING

**Jérôme Sans:** How would you define your works?

**Yan Xing:** A definition can have many layers, such as meaning, spirit, technique, or more likely, ethics. They develop and replace one another over time. Right now, typing my self-explanation in a hotel in Kiev, Ukraine, I suddenly get this feeling that I am being defined in my art as well as my life.

**JS:** Since 2010, you have been re-staging historical performances (from Robert Mapplethorpe to Nam June Paik), why?

**YX:** I have always believed that a good artist—his works in this sense, cannot face the future, only the past. Here, the “past” of course is an open concept, as our judgment of the past depends on our attitude toward the future. I never look for affirmation in the “invention” of a process or the “creation” of a new material. I don’t think “art history” is a project, or at least not a project for an artist’s production. Like history as a motif, art history can mean all the symbols or the symbols of everything.

**JS:** What do the performances you did in 2013 mean to you?

**YX:** I never point out that I’m a performance artist, and as a matter of fact I even believe that all my works are no more than a continuation of the features of classical art.

**JS:** Your work is related to narrative, each work has its own story. Why such a form?

**YX:** It has something to do with my interest

in literature since childhood. It is hard for me to take to the abstract theories, but a narrative, or in a more vulgar sense, to “inherit”, “to spread” or to “pass on” a story has always appealed to me. I used to be skeptical of any account of a story. Please note, here I do not mean “narrative”—narrative is always considered superior—nor am I biased toward an account of a story. Now to depict every detail as fully as I can has become my major interest, and to me, it is fascinating. I often get absorbed in this rich logic that I build myself.

**JS:** What is your relationship with words?

**YX:** I dreamed of becoming a writer when I was young, but as I did more and more reading I found I was getting farther and farther away from the world of literature, so I don’t think I can write as well as those talented writers.

**JS:** How do you connect the pieces in a series? How do you define their relationship? Are they different chapters of an ongoing work?

**YX:** Actually, lots of my works overlap each other. The material and chapters grow for their own sake, therefore becoming as solid as a mortise and tenon joint. Without any doubt, an artist’s production, if magnified to a certain degree, must be an individual’s history.

**JS:** How do you build your scenarios and set the tasks involved?

**YX:** I take a different approach to each work. For me, there is no uniform methodology,

but I hope their outlook of the world can be unified. A scenario is not necessarily the core of my work. I remain skeptical of the core of each work. Most of my job is about integrating these different resources and establishing their “status” in the broad framework.

**JS:** What does creating a picture mean for you?

**YX:** It is probably one of the most confusing words in the postmodernist (or “super-modernist”) context, I believe. “Picture” as a concept is increasingly transcending its two dimensions, so it might be more proper to call it “view,” “image” or “background”—it is the world beyond the concept that builds these concepts.

**JS:** Why do you use black and white as your vocabulary?

**YX:** I’m very rigorous with beauty, so I’m accustomed to only one particular kind of beauty, or an attitude toward beauty.

**JS:** Where does your desire to make video come from?

**YX:** I don’t have any bias concerning media. I knew there was something called video the moment I started to learn art. In this era it is quite hard to refuse or make decisions about media. There is no need to do so.

**JS:** What do you think of your generation?

**YX:** Nothing. I look at many generations other than mine.

*REALISM*, 2011  
Performance, installation (sculpture + clothes),  
b/w digital print  
Exhibition *REALISM*, Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing