



All the Lost Souls
LU ZHANG

Lu Zhang's Mirror of Identity
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所有丢失的靈魂

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By Robert C Morgan

One cannot ignore or underestimate the emotional depth associated with traditional Confucian values in China, specifically in relation to the social environment and parental feelings imposed on a single daughter. Any attempt by her to break away from the conservative expectations of the traditional family unit often results in conflict. The artist Lu Zhang was born and raised in Xi'an, a major historical center in the heart of China. For her to leave this region and come to New York, even in today's rapidly changing social environment, was a major step forward, a victory in fulfilling her desire to be an artist.

From a Western point of view, one might understand this desire as a kind of prescient seduction that lures human beings into the pursuit of art. But what is this seduction really? The late French sociologist Jean Baudrillard claimed that seduction in itself did not necessarily constitute a negative trait. On the contrary, it was neither positive nor negative. Rather seduction revealed its true qualities in the way we apply it to what we do. But this might appear too simple, too absent in connotation. I would complicate Baudrillard's argument by suggesting the following -- that the manner in which a Parisian flaneur from *la belle époque* in the late nineteenth century dealt with seduction is not exactly consistent with how the scribes and courtiers of the Tang Dynasty were seduced by the highly cultivated brushwork of the great scroll painters a millennium earlier. The two approaches to seduction are quite different from one another. In the latter case, the ancient capital of Chang'an was the seat of connoisseurship from the seventh through the tenth centuries, most likely coming into China from Persia by way of the Silk Road. Here I would draw a clear distinction between the art of seduction and the seduction of art, which are vastly different in terms of a sensibility.

When I discuss Chinese art I refer to the latter, thereby claiming that to be seduced by art is to recognize who one is.

So I would ask the following question: Are Lu Zhang's black and white photographs, *All the Lost Souls* (2012), meant to seduce the viewer? I would hope so, but there are no guarantees. For if my reading is correct, this series of work holds a significant edge in regard to one's identity. Like the shaman whose transmits the power of healing through signs of the body, the primal significance of *All the Lost Souls*-- the title being difficult to translate from the original characters -- represents a re-ordering of identity within a collective consciousness. One might consider the seduction as being a reflection of desire, as a mirror, in terms of where the Chinese people find themselves at this moment in history. The sudden changes evident in China's infrastructure, the overwhelming impact of the new technologies, the illimitable focus on global awareness, and the serious environmental problems -- All are taking a enormous toll on how people identify themselves in relation to one another. While the sense of Chinese identity is being questioned, if not threatened, there is irony in that the quality of life shows signs of improving, but, for the most part, only effecting those inducted into the escalating entrepreneurial class. The implications of this bias should be obvious.



Of the eight photographs on exhibit in *All the Lost Souls*, five of them are anonymous portraits of the artist in which she holds a deer skull with antlers pressed against her face in various positions. I say “anonymous” portraits because they are not intended as portraits of Lu Zhang per se. Rather her presence occupies the role of a shamanist engaged in a ritual performance. Yet because the ideographic sign for her surname translates as “deer,” the animal spirit represented by the skull and antlers takes on special significance. Two other photographs show wild misty landscapes taken from the area south of Xi’an near the Zhong Nan mountains (Shaanxi Province), which is part of the Qin Lin range that separates the north from the south of China.

This is where Lu Zhang grew up. It is the region that brought her to feel oneness with nature, a feeling that virtually informs every aspect of her work, including the video film in the exhibition (which was not shot in China). Considered to have a similar theme to *All the Lost Souls*, the film is more directly personal, and therefore carries the subtitle of *Mother Made Sweater*. Like the photographs, the action in this relatively short film is an allegory, but more directly involved with expiating her past in favor of living in the present, i.e., being an artist.



Video, *Mother made*, 2013

In the film, Lu Zhang circumambulates around a heap of rocks in a distant field with mountains in the background resembling Zhong Nan. As she paces around, encircling the heap of rocks, her sweater slowly begins to unravel until the yarn covers the rocks and she is left bare without protective covering, alone by herself with nature.

Without going into further examples of Lu Zhang's work not included in this exhibition, it would be fair to say that her shamanist enactments between her body and her audience are essential, particularly if the audience has a reference to or knowledge of China. I find little doubt that Lu Zhang's message is a timely one, not merely about icons in the sense of the religious and secular art found in Western Renaissance painting, but based on the shamanist principle that the body of one is the body of all. In China, there is a primary understanding that humanity is interconnected in their aspirations for freedom. Lu Zhang's *All the Lost Souls* is meant to transform our thinking. It is a kind of seduction – a signifier, if you will – suggesting that we learn to live according to who we are and in relation to others. In another sense, one might say that to transform is also to resist, which is the crux of the matter.

Robert C. Morgan, Ph.D. is an art critic, writer, and artist, who lives in New York City. Author of many books, including *Art into Ideas: Essays on Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, 1996) and *The End of the Art World* (Allworth, 1998), his book *Reflections on the Condition of Recent Chinese Art* (Beijing: Hebei Educational Publishers, 2013) is translated into Mandarin. He is a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts in Salzburg and the first recipient of the Arcale award in International Art Criticism from the Municipality of Salamanca (1999).

Lu Zhang
Other Works



Twin(s), 2012



Twin(s), 2012



Keep In Touch, 2014



A Painter, 2014



My work is autobiographical, poetical and metaphysical for ranging from documentary and performative photography and video to sculpture and installation. I am interested in

Lu Zhang, Studio, Brooklyn 2014. disclosure universal human nature through investigating the relationship, cultural conflicts and spiritual existence, both politically and personally. I photograph and videotape myself as an object, and reveal hopes out of the traumatized relationships and experiences.

Other than photography and video, I dedicate myself to ceramics among other disciplines. My ceramic sculpture is characteristic human figure. The figures are all narratively related to each other. I am interested in the ambiguous between innocence and danger, beauty and repulsion. The cartoon figures are loosely made. The figure traces the plasticity of sculpture. It creates a micro silent fairy tale world, which is inner connected by the figure's "human" energy.

我的作品是自传形式的，意的，形而上的。我多數工作在攝影，視頻，雕塑和裝置領域。通過觀察人，人與人之間的情感，文化的變化和對精神世界的好奇，來實現對於人的本真性的探索。自我尋找的自主性是我的一大主題。我將自己作為一個視覺的研究對象，通過對自我經歷的反思，利用藝術創作來表達對於現世現實的體悟。藝術創作是一種精神修行的行為。



《母親製造》的行為表演中，我在美國新墨西哥的廣闊天地中，將母親親手為我編織的紅毛衣小心翼翼的剪成碎片，希望能夠用一種不違背中國尊老的傳統文化，透析自我空間的重要性。除了攝影與視頻，我的創作還有很大一部份是陶藝作品。在陶藝作品的創作過程中，我創作卡通人物造型，但是在身體和形態的表達上，根據我的個人經歷，進行了扭曲和變化。對於人性的天真和險惡，美麗與厭惡的多樣性的一種窺視。

Solo Exhibition,
2014 Twin(s). Ouchi Gallery, New York

Selected Group Exhibition,
2014 Eat Clay Kill. Steuben Gallery, New York,
2014 Woman House. A.I.R GALLERY, New York,
2013 Generations IX: The Red/Pink. A.I.R GALLERY, New York
2013 Color: Photography Now. Black box Gallery, New York
2013 Made in New York, Ouchi Gallery, New York
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