



Yanwu, thirteen years old, ink jet edition, 110 x 110 cm

The Galerie Dix9 is pleased to introduce you to :

YOUTH SELF PORTRAITS [PART 1]

Yanwu YUAN

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YOUTH SELF PORTRAITS [PART 1]

Yuan Yanwu found some old yellowed photos of her childhood when she was living with her maternal grand parents in Shanghai.

She is two, five, nine, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen or sixteen years old.

Moments of self-rediscovery, as when, little girl sitting on a small stool, she was secretly looking at herself in the mirror. An installation recreates the device at the origin of the work while in a video, Yanwu talks to the spectator.

Today, facing these pictures, Yanwu interrogates this image of the self as the Other (the child) in the mirror. More than a memory to be reactivated, childhood is for her an ideal to be created.

Photography? Painting? Yanwu goes beyond photography; she paints with her computer, and then comes back to photography; She recreates from the photo, going further than visible reality. She slips into the Other, the Other whom she was and whom she is not anymore.

More than photography, more than painting, her work tends to give another status to images.



Yanwu 9 years old, ink jet edition, 110 x110 cm



Yanwu 16 years old, ink jet edition, 110 x110 cm

Yanwu's Secret

Yuan Yanwu, when she was a kid, didn't like photos. And she chose to become a photographer. This is a paradox that her strange "youth self portraits" can help us understand. It is her face, but she didn't take the pictures. She dug up, according to the Freudian metaphor, images of her in the familial archives, and then began to retouch them. Photos were painted and sculpted. Yanwu photographs after photos, using photos of her, taken by others. She works on "ready-made" photos, and presents as real photos the products of software.

The lie would be invisible if there wasn't this title looking like an enigma, and the deliberate neo-Pictorialist treatment of the retouched images. A work that's so subtle that it is not visible at once.

Yanwu doesn't look at her memories with too much emotion, and besides the Chinese modesty would oppose to it. This step is not a nostalgic evocation, it is rather an invocation. Yanwu reinvents her image to be able to affirm it. She does not intent to awake the past; she recreates herself through the transformation of a dark traumatism into fruitful moments. This path is a work on herself, but also a sort of negative narcissism. Her disturbing work is anchored on childhood pains and suffering; and the autobiographic base of Yanwu's work is fundamental. However, the fantastical density of her work has a universal reach.

Everything has been changed on the original photos, including the argentic turned into digital technology, the changed scale, and the focalization on her character.... Yanwu methodically erased the dark zones... and colored the image as if she was trying to bring the flesh back to life, and to underline both her life and her peculiarity. The deletion of the characters and sets surrounding her (she only kept her own portrait out of the context, in close-up), symbolizes the child that doesn't have marks to understand what is happening to him. The loss of love is also a loss of sense. Patient work of archeology. She digs the photos, she releases her face.

The artist meticulously redrew the old photos, until she completely covered them. Wear and imperfections have been erased. Yanwu's memory is painful, and she repairs those

erased. Yanwu's memory is painful, and she repairs those old pictures like her own bruises. The imaginary portraits of Yanwu look like these building sites of restoration carried out in China, in which to save a monument, often, the old has to disappear.

The artist, through her modifications, seems to play the game of censure, from which she suffered in the past. She mimed the gestures to better undermine them, while proceeding by elimination and addition, using the cut, the blank, the censorship. These operations question us on what mixes in the same movement the most intimate and policy, the ideological censure and the integrism of a too strict education. In the modified photographs, she seems to insist on the repudiation of their true authors, as if she was exorcizing an unhappy childhood. Under the image of seriousness, appear the history of a broken family, and the secret wounds of a little girl.

What happened is hidden in these simple and purified photos. You can feel there is something to seek in these elliptic photographs. It may be a reminder of hide-and-seek, a game that children love even if they can be scared that nobody will find them. There is in Yanwu's work a little bit of the "jardin d'hiver", a picture that one won't show us, that we will always ignore, but that we recognize because it deeply exists in each of us, like an enigma that we are all trying to solve.

Retouching photos can also be seen as a protection, which allows unconscious desires to reach the conscious. She acts like the dream: the repressed part of the mind can reach the conscious level, only if it is deformed, disguised. Thus only, what is latent can become manifest. Thus only, Yanwu can open us her photo album.

Barthes likes Yanwu's photos; because they are silent and not thundering. This is due to their purpose. They are photographs of the self-absence, of a perseverant silence; photographs of an ordered alignment, of a place she had to take, of the gestures she was expected to make and that

she was executing like an automat. Yanwu always hated being photographed; she instinctively knew there was a risk to lose herself. With photography, she was symbolically undergoing this unbearable look on her. Strict protocol of the family photo which reminds us of other imprisonments.

Her step of reappropriation of old photos is less a renewal of the affirmation of the author's death than a real necessity: invent from the photos, against them, an identity since it was impossible for her to make revive the old one.

She was not recognizing herself in these family icons. She was a stranger. The glance of the others, of the Other, manufactured doubles of her that she was facing, with a feeling of dizziness. Her "autoportraits" have kept this trace of strangeness. It is impossible to be both desire and subject of the desire, to be different, to be her. Remained only the suffering related to an ideal image of model little girl, neither alive nor real, dead little girl because it is only a projection of the adults, a "dead thing" would say Mike Kelley. It is thus not uninteresting to notice that the artist is a woman, and that she finally puts her name on these pictures.

Feeling empty, pierced by the glance of the other without a possible shelter. To become a pure surface reflecting the severe and pitiless glance of the other: that is what her petrified, closed expressionless face is telling us. She is facing us with her eyes strangely fixing us, her dead eyes.

And her only sign of rebellion is probably her refusal to smile. Discrete sign of her refusal to stay in the row, refusal to accept totally the Authority, the Order, the Paternal Law, which are only other names for Destiny, History, Time, the merciless power of the impulse of death, "all that soils and destroys you" according to Modiano. And this refusal to smile might be the precious secret of Yanwu.

Eric VINASSAC

Eric VINASSAC
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BIOGRAPHIE

Born in 1976 in China in the region of the Yellow Mountain (Huang Shan)
Yanwu lives and works between Shanghai and Paris

2006-2008 - MST Photography and Multimedia, University of Paris 8

2003-2004 – French Institute of Press, University of Panthéon-Assas, Paris

1998-2003 - Journalist for the daily newspaper Xinmin Evening News, Shanghai

1994-1998 – Degree in journalism, University of Nankin, China

Exhibitions

April 2009 - Lille Art Fair, Gallery Dix9

January 2009 - Espace Cinko, passage Choiseul, Paris

January 2007 - Forum Blanc-Mesnil, Seine-Saint-Denis

November 2006 - "Transvers", Espace Cerise, Paris

October 2006 - "Porte T", gallery of the France Stadium, Paris