

Yuan Yanwu SELF-PORTRAITS

Exhibition from February 5 to 21, 2015



No Title, 2013, argile, glass, laiton

For her second solo exhibition at Galerie Dix9, Yuan Yanwu offers new works which are quite surprising from the artist who previously presented exquisite and peaceful images of her youth self-portraits. Certainly Yanwu extends here the same questions of identity, but this time, she engaged in lively and almost impudence. As if she had changed also her way of creating.

"Watercolor imposed on me" she says. Water and paper is a pictorial tradition in China but Yanwu did not practice it. "With photography, I would have caught moments; with watercolor, I tried to translate the experience of movements, changes, transitions".

What was also important to her is that the work is done by hand, as for the endless retouching in her previous series. "To translate the time, I needed a work that lasts." This is indeed the time that orders this new series, close to a personal diary, with particular cruelty, incarnated in self-portraits with faces marked with wrinkles, worn, defeated, double spellbound, hallucinatory impressions. The child's head was cracked. Porcelain broke. This "catastrophe" (disaster), as Deleuze would have said, is what Yanwu wants to show.

The color is often diluted as soaked with tears, floating a drift. But she sometimes seems recovering, getting stronger to face this deleterious fluidity, what she translates through successive layers, unified by turpentine. This double movement of shift away and start, is a way to mean a sense of dispossession and the will to resist. Something that we already discerned in "Self-portraits Part 1". In that previous series of exquisite images of herself as a child, smoothed by a long and meticulous editing, Yanwu discreetly denounced the violence of those who had imprisoned her in the photographing. Today she firmly asserts her existence by showing blurred moments – moments in between when she could feel a stranger to herself. By showing it, Yanwu gets free of those moments of trouble. And in these singular and intimate self-portraits, it is not surprising that watercolor frees itself from transparency, as if it also wanted to take shape.

Eric Vinassac

Born in 1976 in Huang Shan, China, Yuan Yanwu was a journalist in Shanghai before studying photography in Paris. Her series Youth Self-Portraits was first shown at Galerie Dix9 in 2009, before been presented at Casino Luxembourg, then at Alliance Française in Beijing as part of the festival Caochangdi Photospring.